

The Collection

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Preacher: Rev James Maciver

[0 : 00] 1 Corinthians chapter 16 and the first two verses of this chapter will focus our minds on these two verses for a short time this morning.

Now concerning the collection for the saints. As I directed the churches of Galatia, so you also are to do. On 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.

When I arrive, I will send those whom you accredit by letter to carry your gift to Jerusalem. If it seems advisable that I should go also, they will accompany me.

Particularly the first two verses, as I said, of this chapter. It's striking that without any sense of inappropriateness or embarrassment, Paul moves from that magnificent discourse of the resurrection in chapter 15 to something that some might think is rather mundane, a money collection for the church.

But he does so very deliberately. You mustn't think that this chapter, chapter 16, or these first few verses here, are something of an afterthought or just something that's loosely fixed on to the previous chapter and something much less in importance than the other things he was saying.

[1 : 26] It's really not like that. It's joined specifically here to the previous chapter because chapter 15, verse 58, which we also read, Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.

Well, the next thing he mentions about the collection belongs within the framework of that work of the Lord and abounding in the work of the Lord. It's not something that you need, that you have to see outside of the legitimate work of the Lord or of a lesser importance than what he said there.

And, of course, verse 58 is really itself the outcome or the conclusion, the climax, if you like, to the great discourse on the resurrection that's taken up most of the previous verses in chapter 15.

So, really, he's saying, here's the resurrection of Jesus, here's our own resurrection of the saints of God, of the people of God. Therefore, because of that, in light of that, be steadfast, be immovable, be always abounding in the work of the Lord, but don't forget the collection.

That seems to be the logic of the way that it's all tied up together. And so we should see that what he refers to here as the collection really belongs within the whole spectrum or the work of the Lord in its entirety.

[2 : 50] It is itself a feature of the work of the Lord or belongs to that work of the Lord specifically. The collection here was obviously a collection for the church in Jerusalem.

For whatever reason, the church in Jerusalem, we find this elsewhere as well, and Paul's letters had fallen on hard times financially. We don't know exactly the reason for that. But Paul organized a collection for them.

Here, he's writing to the Corinthians in regard to that. And he's saying that he had done this also in the church of the Galatians as well, that he had recommended this or directed them as well to the same ends.

So while the collection is specific as a collection for that church in Jerusalem, I want to take it today as giving us directions or principles for our own financial support of the gospel, which as I've said and as the chapter puts it, is something which is directly related to and belongs within the whole spectrum of the Lord's cause, the Lord's work, that we are all engaged in in certain ways, one way or another.

So we're looking at a pattern. And while this, as I said, is a specific collection for Jerusalem, nevertheless, it gives us a pattern. It gives us principles for our own contribution to the support of the gospel financially.

[4 : 17] And the beauty of this is that it's not something that Kirk Sessions or deacons' courts or ministers are actually setting out by way of advice, by way of suggestions.

This is, in fact, Scripture giving us principles upon which we can actually contribute in relation to supporting the gospel.

And it's important in its own way. And we're dealing with it in principles because we're not given details as to, or advice or counsel as to certain details, like, for example, whether do you use cash or do you use a check?

Do you put it in the plate as money? Or do you put it in an envelope as some people do? We're not given directions. A lot of these more detailed aspects of the collection or the support of the gospel are organized according to local needs, according to personal preferences.

But what's before us here are certain principles that we must always use and have in mind as we do things in whatever practical way we set about doing the collection.

[5 : 26] And there are five principles. Five principles that are important for us to take note of. First of all, there's the principle of obligation.

Principle of obligation. Something that really comes surely out of our relationship with Christ, with God himself, that we are under obligation to support his cause.

And that's not just prayerfully and spiritually, but also practically in whatever way, practically, including financially, that should be something that's obvious to us as Christians.

And for yourselves, I'm sure it is that. But Paul is giving here directions. He's saying, As I directed the churches of Galatia, so you also are to do.

And he mentions how they're going to set about it. Principle of obligation follows from the fact that Scripture gives us direction. Giving us direction means here is God's own specific direction.

[6 : 25] Here is God's own requirement of us. It's not something that is to be treated as something that's other than an obligation.

It's not something that we can treat as if it was really an extra that you can choose to do or not to do. It's something that, he says, an obligation as I directed.

Now, it seems that Paul was very keen that the Corinthians and others that he wrote to would not regard the support of the gospel as a tax. The Roman Empire people were taxed heavily.

And there were so many taxes that burdened people's lives. And Paul is adamant, This is not a tax. He's saying this is something out of obligation to the Lord. It's not something forced upon you.

It's not something the government requires. It's not something the church itself has actually said is necessary for you to do. This is an obligation that's laid upon you by the Lord.

[7 : 25] It's something that grows out of your relationship with the Lord. It's something that Scripture directs in that regard. And you notice it's an individual responsibility.

It's not something optional for individuals. It's not something you can leave, for example, to just someone else to do on your behalf. What he's saying is, So you also, each of you is to put something aside and store it up.

Each of you is to contribute your own portion of the support of gospel ministry. That's really what the logic of it is.

Now he's saying here, Each of you. Sometimes we find that we use, if we're using an envelope, for example, or standing order, we have it perhaps for a married couple or even for a family.

But it does mean that the obligation is on each of us. So that even in that context, we ought each of us to be thinking about what that amount is and how it relates to the work of the gospel locally and further afield.

[8 : 30] So the obligation is on each of us to think, How can I actually contribute financially and otherwise to the support of the gospel? Remember, it's not just the support, as we'll see, of gospel ministry in your own locality, in your own congregation.

It is, of course, that. But it's also, as we'll see, beyond that as well. It reaches beyond, as Paul is saying here, the collection was not just for, it wasn't even specifically for the people in Corinth.

It was actually for the church in Jerusalem. They were to think of supporting the gospel beyond their own borders, beyond the limits of their own congregation. So the first thing to say, the principle of obligation.

Now, obligation seems and can be a very hard, a very sort of legalistic thing. And when we're saying here that the Bible here is telling us we're under obligation individually, each of us, to contribute to the support of the gospel, that seems, perhaps, it could come across as something

that's just an obligation from the sense of being a burden, almost like a tax.

Well, if you go to 2 Corinthians, and 2 Corinthians chapters 8 and 9, both these chapters are very much taken up with the same topic. So they expand on what's here. And you can follow that up yourselves if you read chapter 8 and 9 of 2 Corinthians, whenever you get an opportunity, as soon as possible, after a study today, because that expands largely of what's said here in chapter 16, these verses we're looking at.

[10:02] But here in chapter 9, verse 7, you notice there how Paul is directing, each one must give as he has made up his mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

In other words, he's following the example that Christ set us. That's going to be our final principle, the principle of example, Christ's own example. Christ didn't come into the world reluctantly to save us from our sins.

He was under obligation because it was part of his covenant with the Father. But he didn't come in a way that was forced to come. He didn't actually come out of obligation just in a legalistic sense. He came because he loved to come. He came because he came cheerfully, he came willingly. That's the principle in obligation as well. It's not simply an obligation in a bare sense of the word. It's out of love. It's out of devotion to Christ. It's an obligation from his grace toward us and from what he has done for us.

[11:12] That's the first principle. It's one of obligation. The second principle is the principle of regularity. The principle of regularity. You know, it's there, verse 2, on the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside.

Now that implies, it's not specified, but it makes sense that we think of the gathered congregation of the Corinthians. It's the first day of the week.

It's the Lord's Day. And each of them is to put something aside. And that's where the practice of having the collection, the main collection, of the church on the Lord's Day has come from.

And that's what's implied in the text that on the first day, each is to put aside because on that day, they come together. Why else would he mention it? They come together to worship the Lord.

It implies the worship gathering. Of course, that makes a theological link too. Remember we said it's closely linked to chapter 15. Well, the first day of the week, the Lord's Day, the day when we specifically associate that day with the Lord's resurrection and with anticipation, again, of his coming, of the rest of heaven.

[12:22] Well, that's what's dealt with in chapter 15, isn't it? The resurrection of Jesus. Now, that feeds into the support of his gospel on the first day of the week. Each of you is to put something aside.

Now, this is difficult really to translate precisely. You find different kinds of translation for this part of the verse. Put something aside and store it up.

But it implies that there's a collection at specific or a specific point to which each person contributes. And that's what we do in our own congregational setting and throughout most of our congregations in the church as well. Put, store it up really means literally store it as treasure or in the treasury, which is why most interpreters or commentators will say that this actually is a reference just following on from the Old Testament practice of the treasury.

What was in the temple, particularly as the temple was arranged, that there was a certain storage point for tithes, for goods that were brought in as offerings to the Lord.

[13:29] Well, this follows on from the Old Testament practice. While we no longer have sacrifices or first fruits of our offerings from the ground or whatever, it's still nevertheless the same in principle that regularly on the first day of the week we actually give to the Lord that which supports his cause, his gospel, his spiritual temple, if you like.

And you find that in, for example, 2 Chronicles chapter 31 where Hezekiah was dealing with reforms that were necessary in his day. One of the things we find mentioned there, 2 Chronicles 31 verses 11 and 12 is that he arranged to have certain rooms in the temple or compartments in the temple set aside so that they then brought the tithes and the other goods and gifts to the Lord and stored them in these rooms.

In other words, they were regarding that as the storage place for the contributions of the people towards the temple upkeep or towards the Lord's cause.

Here, he's saying, on the first day, each of you is to put something aside as the treasury or into the treasury. And that is itself a principle.

We're not given directions then as to how we are to do that. Some people contribute by envelope and that's just simply so that those who have the responsibility of looking after the church's finances and the allocation of them will have a record of what the income of the church is in certain ways. [15:09] But we're not given specific directions here that it has to be by envelope or something like that, that it has to be by just money in the plate, cash or check, whatever. These details are not given us.

Some people, some of yourselves, contribute by standing order and others find that difficult because the standing order is not so easy to fit into the emphasis on being the first day of the week. Well, the standing order is not improper to use. It's not something that's impossible to fit into the practice of regularity and in fact the standing order ensures regularity and it actually ensures convenience as well so that if you're not able through illness or whatever to be in church you don't have to have your envelope given to somebody else.

It's automatically off your bank account. That's not something that's necessary but it's something that can be fitted especially like myself for example I use a standing order I do it weekly so that it fits into the weekly pattern even if it's not always specifically on the Lord's Day on the first day of the week.

I think it's possible to have it like that arranged so that you're following the regularity the pattern of weekly giving towards the support of the gospel but what it does is it tends to diminish the standing order does tend to diminish that worshipful aspect if you like of putting your money in the plate or putting your envelope in the plate because it belongs to the devotion that we show towards the Lord.

[16:52] You don't just put your envelope in the plate just because it's customary or just as a matter of fact sort of thing. It is itself an act of devotion and it belongs to the devotional side of our life it's a contribution that we're specifically given to the Lord and to his cause.

And it's not as easy to do that when you're using a standing order I'm not saying it's at all improper as I said I do it myself but I should be thinking more often than I am of the fact that my standing order this week is going into the congregation's account and therefore giving thanks to the Lord for the ability for the resources to do that and asking the Lord to bless that contribution.

That's how it should be for us because it's part of our devotional giving to the Lord. So it's the principle of obligation and however we do it there's the principle of regularity.

Thirdly there's the principle of unity. The principle of unity and this is something that is through both in the local congregational context but also in the wider dimension of the denomination or even wider to the Lord's cause.

Remember this collection here for the Corinthians was specifically for the saints at Jerusalem. Most of them had never been to Jerusalem probably and certainly hadn't met the people in the church in Jerusalem and nevertheless here was Paul saying to them this collection on the first day of the week put it together because it's specifically for the saints at Jerusalem.

[18:27] They had fallen on hard times. Now when it comes to our own sharing out together which is an aspect of our fellowship the word in the Greek of the New Testament *koinonia* means fellowship.

It means both sharing in some things together and sharing out some things between each other and the sharing in and the sharing out applies to the financial aspects of supporting the gospel as well as other things.

And you go for example to Romans chapter 15 just for a moment if you have a look at that verses 15 sorry chapter 15 verses 25 to 27.

He's talking here again about his journey and his hopes for the journey. He says in verse 25 at present however I am going to Jerusalem bringing aid to the saints for Macedonia and the Chaya have been pleased to make some contribution for the poor among the saints at Jerusalem.

They were pleased to do it and indeed they owe it to them for if the Gentiles have come to share in their spiritual blessings they also ought to be of service to them in material blessings.

[19:48] Now you see the argument he's using there he's saying here the people in the Gentile world such as Corinth or Galatia wherever it was have actually benefited spiritually from the church in Jerusalem that's where the gospel spread out from.

The contribution of the gospel message and the salvation in that gospel message came from Jerusalem to these people in Corinth to this Gentile world. Now he says they're under obligation

because of that because of the spiritual blessing that's come from Jerusalem to Corinth or to Rome wherever you're under obligation when they are in need in Jerusalem to actually contribute towards their need materially as it arises.

It's an argument from the spiritual to the practical or to the financial even. And what he's saying there in Romans fits into the passage here in Corinthians as well.

It's the principle of unity. They're not to argue in Corinth well Jerusalem is miles and miles away from where we are. We don't know what these people have actually been up to.

We don't know why they're in need and they're so distant from us. We've never met them. Paul is saying they're one church with you. God does not have a church in Jerusalem and another church in Corinth and another church in Thessalonica.

[21 : 10] He has one church and the groups that belong to that one church are in different places in the world as they were at least that time in the days of the apostles.

They weren't denominations of course in those days. So what he's saying is because the saints in Jerusalem belong to the one church of Christ and because they've benefited you've benefited from them previously now you are to actually return that and respond to their need because they are brothers sisters with you in the Lord.

That's how we have to look at our contributions as well not just simply for our local needs it's also for the Lord's cause outwith our own locality and our congregational needs.

So it's the principle of unity. We're joined to Christians elsewhere and especially when we're thinking of it denominationally that's especially what we think of and that's always been the case from the time that the free church was set up and Thomas Jammers insisted on this that it had to be a Presbyterian system in the practicalities as well as theologically because it's the principle of the strong helping the weak.

I'm not sure how well that's kept to today but that's still the principle of a Presbyterian church that even in financial terms those who have much can actually give to those who have little.

[22 : 45] Those who are struggling financially can benefit from those who have by God's grace more finance or other goods than elsewhere and it's the same thing that Paul is arguing here for the saints in Jerusalem.

They've got specific needs financially and so the Corinthians are directed to make a collection because they are their fellow Christians. They belong to the same family.

That's why they're giving in unity with them. The principle of obligation, the principle of regularity, the principle of unity, fourthly the principle of generosity.

Generosity. If we go forward again to 2 Corinthians chapter 8. Like I said, chapters 8 and 9 are dealing with this, but chapter 8 verses 12 to 15, where he's saying here, for if the readiness is there, it is acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have.

I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened, but that as a matter of fairness, your abundance at the present time should supply their need, so that their abundance may supply your need, that there may be fairness or equality.

[24 : 12] Fairness in the sense of sharing out the resources that they have financially. So there's a principle of generosity, now it's to be in proportion to what a person has, not what a person doesn't have, the Lord and the apostle under the Lord's direction, it's not saying put yourself into serious debt in order to support your fellow Christians elsewhere, that's not really saying, it's according to how everybody prospers, that's what he says in the verses we've got before us as well, as he may prosper, each of you is to put something aside, as he may prosper, but it is, as he may prosper, it's not less than he may prosper, even though it's not more than he may prosper, it's in proportion to the way that the Lord, by his grace, has enabled us to prosper, whatever level of prosperity that is, our giving back in return to him is in accordance with that, is to be in proportion to that, now that raises the question of what is a proportion of my income, what is a proportionate amount to give to the support of the gospel, everybody will have their own opinions on that, and some people will say, well it was a tithe in the Old

Testament, a tenth of the goods, a tenth of the resources were given to the Lord, that should be how it is in the New Testament, there's no direction as far as I know in the New Testament that says that's how it must be, but it's still a good guide, it's still something that gives us a good guide as to what our minimum should be really towards the support of the Lord's cause, the important thing is that the priority is given to God first, to his cause first, to the gospel first, and then the remainder, if you're working on a tenth of your income, when you think about it, it's only just one tenth that's

given to the Lord if you're working on that basis, nine tenths of it is left for ourselves, the Lord is being overly generous in what he's allocating to ourselves, if we're working on that principle, and really just then saying, well I'll take a tenth of it, the rest is as you want to use it, as your own needs actually need it used.

I'm not saying you have to use a tenth, I'm not saying that it's very obvious in the New Testament, but it's a very good guide because that was the Old Testament tithing, the way of proportioning what was given, and I remember, very well that Malachi's complaint was in his day that the people were not fulfilling their obligations, and I'm not saying that because you're not, that's not what I'm saying at all or suggesting, but remember Malachi's complaint was that the people in his day were quite content just to give what was left to God.

They were keeping the best of the flocks for themselves, they were keeping the best of the resources for themselves, they were looking then at what was left over and saying well that'll do for the sacrifice, that'll do for the temple, that'll do for the Lord.

Malachi's saying you've got it the wrong way around. You begin with the Lord, you begin with a response to God's goodness, to God's grace, you give him what is his due, and then he gives you, in his generosity, he gives you the rest for your own needs.

[27 : 37] In other words, what Paul is saying is that it's as he may prosper, or as we saw in 2 Corinthians 8, in accordance with what a person actually possesses, has, it's not talking about minimums, even if you work on the principle of a tenth, it's still talking of generosity, to give us much to the Lord as is his due, it really follows from verse 58 of chapter 15, it's talking there about abounding in the work of the Lord, it's not talking about minimums, it's not talking about as little as possible, he's talking about abounding and that follows into the support of the gospel as well, so that if we have a change in our circumstances, what the apostle is saying is, well, you review your contributions, if you don't any longer have work, if you're out of work, then obviously that's going to impact upon the proportion that you give to the Lord, to the gospel.

On the other hand, if your income increases, then that also should be something, even if it's a standing order, we should review it in such a way that keeps up with the proportion that God has blessed us by.

That's only not just sensible, but it's something that's spiritually appropriate when the Lord has abounded toward us in his grace.

So, the principle of obligation, of regularity, of unity, of generosity, and there's one final one, and that's the principle, of example. And again, I need you just to turn to 2 Corinthians chapter 8, for this final principle.

Chapter 8 and verse 12, which we also saw earlier, where he talks there about the givings that they are to give to the Lord.

[29 : 42] It should really be the verses before verse 12, at verse 8. I say this not as a command, but to prove by the earnestness of others that your love is also genuine.

Now, he's really saying this is something that proves your love, that you actually support the cause of the Lord in this way. for you for you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.

That's the principle of example, and there's no greater principle than that one. You see what it's saying, the Lord Jesus Christ, you know, he says, his grace.

How do you know his grace? How has his grace come to light? How has he demonstrated his grace, his favor toward us? Well, in this he says, that though he was rich, how was he rich?

He was rich because he was divine and is divine. Rich with the richness of the Godhood of Christ. That's how rich he was.

[30 : 57] Yet, for your sake, he became poor. The king became a servant. The Lord became poor.

He came into a poor family. He was born into a poor household. He lived his life in poverty. He depended on others though he was God.

God. What Paul is saying is, that's the principle that we have to have in mind. That's the example so that our contribution or the collection as he calls it in chapter 16 is actually part of what it means to be under the lordship of Christ.

Part of what it means to be under the lordship of Christ. And being under the lordship of Christ, we are under obligation to follow his example.

The collection is really a response to Christ's giving of himself. What we give to the support of his gospel is a response to his giving of himself.

[32 : 14] And he gave himself. He didn't give a portion of himself. himself. He gave himself. He held nothing back of himself in his love for his people.

And our act of appreciation is not just in worship as we're worshipping him now. It's in the contribution we give materially, financially, to the support of his gospel.

Principles that guide our givings. Obligation, regularity, unity, generosity, and example.

May God bless these thoughts to us. Let's pray. Lord our God, we give thanks for the resources that you give us materially and financially, by which we are able to support your gospel, your cause, your church, and the world.

We bless you for the gospel. We thank you for your word. We thank you for every way that's open to us to support your gospel locally and outwith our own bounds. We thank you today, O Lord, that you place it in our hearts to do so, that you enable us to open our hearts so that we also open our resources and give back in return to you what is appropriate for your endowment of our lives.

[33 : 40] We pray that you would bless us as a congregation in material and spiritual ways. Help us, Lord, we pray, to gather together regularly as we are counseled, to give to the support of your cause, and enable us thereby, O Lord, to know of your own blessing upon what we offer to you.

Hear us, we pray, for Jesus' sake. Amen. Let's now sing in conclusion. This time we're singing in Psalm 62. Psalm 62 and sing Psalms on page number 80.

The tune of Heron Gate will sing from verse 6, from verse 7 to verse 12. My honor and salvation rest on God, my rock and mighty fort. O people trust in him always, to him alone pour out your heart.

Verses 7 to 12 on page 80. And the tune is Heron Gate, to God's praise. Amen. My honor and salvation rest on board my rock and mighty fort.

O people trust in people trusted him always, to him alone pour out your heart.

[35 : 22] The low-born man is but a breath. The high-born man is man is man is not but a life.

We have fallen side by side. They come to nothing but a side.

Do not seek after wealth by horse Prince and and the Oz Please set not your heart on what is in.

My God has spoken, I have heard, that you are strong and loving, Lord.

He's gone according to his needs. You will assuredly reward.

[37 : 00] I'll go to the main door this morning. Now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you now and always. Amen.

Amen.