

**Text:** 1 Corinthians 16:1-4

**Title:** First Day Giving

**Truth:** Financial giving is a part of church life.

**Date/Location:** Sunday April 25, 2021 at FBC

## Introduction

<sup>1</sup> Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given orders to the churches of Galatia, so you must do also: <sup>2</sup> On the first *day* of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come. <sup>3</sup> And when I come, whomever you approve by *your* letters I will send to bear your gift to Jerusalem. <sup>4</sup> But if it is fitting that I go also, they will go with me.

We move from the Christian teaching on resurrection to the Christian teaching about giving. Chapter 15 as well as earlier chapters 1-6 concern matters that Paul heard about from people connected to the church, not necessarily that the church wanted him to know or answer. The first verses of chapter 16 comprise the last segment in the letter where Paul is answering an inquiry from the church. We can see that by noticing the phrase “Now concerning...” which occurred earlier in 1 Cor. 7:1, 7:25, 8:1, and 12:1 as an introduction to several new topics.

## I. The Collection for the Saints, v. 1

- A. The church required instruction on collecting a financial gift for believers far away in Jerusalem (location given at the end of v. 3). Paul shared the same direction here as he had already given to churches in Galatia.
- B. This collection was a big project supported by several churches that Paul had worked with. Consider a few passages in the Bible where it is mentioned:
  - 1. Macedonia and Achaia were involved, Romans 15:25-28. These places included churches like Philippi, Berea, and Thessalonica. Achaia includes Corinth (deduced from 2 Cor. 9:2).

2. The surrounding context of 2 Cor. 8:1-9:15 speaks of the same financial project.
- C. This collection was not for church operations in this case, but for the help of believers who were impoverished by a famine. Through no irresponsibility of their own, they faced a situation where it was difficult and expensive to grow or purchase food.
- D. The expectation of Christians is that they will support especially their brothers and sisters when in need. Consider Galatians 6:10 and 1 John 3:17.
- E. This is a good place to point out different categories of support.
1. Church financial support in New Testament thinking largely directed toward *people*. In our context, this is still largely true because we support pastors and missionaries with a large portion of the budget. Ministerial support is exemplified in 2 Cor. 11:9, Phil. 4:10, and 2:30 about Epaphroditus, who probably brought the funds to the apostle Paul.
  2. We have the additional challenge of *buildings* that need to be maintained. We also support local ministries (VBS, for example).
  3. What Paul is talking about in 1 Cor. 16, we would call “benevolence,” which is a different category than pastors, missionaries, and buildings. We have offered such support to those who are known to us.
  4. Whether for pastors, missionaries, buildings, local outreach, or benevolence, it is all part of the work of the church.
- F. In our church situation, we have supported several of our families during the COVID lockdown, job losses, and illness. It has been a blessing for me as a pastor to be an agent in that giving on behalf of the entire church. However, sometimes church help has been turned down because there are other resources available for some of the families who appear to have a need. That is a marvelous thing, which we can attribute to our nation’s great prosperity.
- G. Paul was laying down an instruction, an *order*. He could do this because he was an apostle. That is, he was a specially appointed representative of Jesus Christ. There were only a handful of such

people ever in history, and they all were witnesses of the resurrected Jesus.

No one has such authority today! All we have is a delegated authority by which we proclaim the truth and directives of the New Testament. God expects us to obey them. There is only a very light enforcement mechanism, however, for disobedience. There is removal from the church (discipline), and there is mutual exhortation, admonishment, accountability, and the like. But that is all. This is because the Christian faith is a voluntary faith. It is a life chosen willingly by its participants. If they should choose to disobey God, that is between God and them. Meanwhile, such a person may be removed from a church fellowship, but that is all that can be done.

H. These orders were not only relevant to the Galatian churches. They had wider application. Paul did not give instructions to one church that were unique, unable to be applied in another setting. This is why all the letters we have in the New Testament—21 plus 7 letters in Revelation—are so relevant to us today.

## II. The First Day of the Week, v. 2a

A. Verse 2 opens with the time marker as to when obedience is going to be expected to these orders from the apostle. By the way, that brings up a good point: an activity needs to have some kind of time allotment for it. You are going to do WHAT, WHEN? It is easy to have good intentions, but not actually get done what needs to be done. “I’ll get to it someday.”

Paul says to implement the collection for the saints on THE FIRST DAY OF THE WEEK. We have a similar thing with our giving since COVID started: we do not pass an offering plate. People literally *forget* to drop their offering in the plate in the back. I completely understand that with all that is on my mind on a Sunday morning. But at some point, giving has to be important enough that you actually do it *sometime*. It is not just “I’ll get around to it sometime.” Bills never seem to come that way!

B. So, church giving was to happen on the first day of the week. By the way, that means SUNDAY. It does not mean MONDAY. Sunday

has always been and always will be the true first day of the week. It is not the first day of our *work-week*, but it is the first day of the whole week.

- C. Why on the first day? Church meetings were already scheduled. This was when it was naturally convenient to take up the collection. We have other evidence in the New Testament that church meetings occurred on Sunday: Acts 20:7 and Revelation 1:10. This is very sensible because the first day is the day that Jesus arose from the dead (John 20:1).

Some people try to make a big case that we must meet on Saturdays to obey the Law of Moses. This is false doctrine and we should ignore it—because we are not under the Law of Moses, and because of the principle of conscience taught in Romans 14. You can meet any day of the week you want. There is not even a command to meet on Sunday. We live under grace, not under law. But by common agreement, Christians recognize that since we are required to meet regularly:

1. It makes sense to commemorate our Lord's resurrection which happened on the first day of the week.
2. Christianity in the west has impacted the culture in such a way that Sunday is a common "weekend" day off which is perfect for meeting.
3. In addition, we want to give God the firstfruits of our week, not the leftovers. Therefore He gets our first hours on Sunday. Give Him your best, dear friend, not your worst.

### **III. Gathering the Gift, v. 2b**

- A. Each one is to participate. It is a part of regular worship to give such funds. Everyone can put aside *something*.
- B. Each one is to participate as he may prosper. Obviously, this means that some will give more, others less. This is not a "poll tax" or a tithe or "membership dues." It is a proportional, generous, sacrificial, regular, grace-giving standard. No one can tell you how much to give; as the Lord has led you, give.
1. Proportional: those who have more can and must give more.

2. Generous: giving a few bucks in the offering plate as a token is just that—a token. You know how much money it takes today to run a household. Church expenses rise with inflation too!
  3. Sacrificial: 2 Samuel 24:24 is a good verse to ponder in this connection. If the giving has no effect on your budget, then you are not giving sacrificially.
  4. Regular: it is part of worshipping God. We cannot not give and claim that we are participating in the full range of worship activities.
  5. Grace-giving: 2 Cor. 8:7 informs us that giving is a grace. As God gave to us who do not deserve, so we can give graciously.
- C. Paul does not want a “scene” when he comes of everyone bringing their monies into the church, so he says that the collection should be stored up week by week until he comes, when it will finally all be done. This will keep the operation more low-key.
- D. I must re-emphasize at this point that the church member is not obligated to give 10%. He is morally responsible to give *something*, as God has prospered him. If a woman supports herself, so is she. A woman who is under the care, provision, and protection of a husband gives with her husband, not out of “her own” finances. But the frequency, amount, and so forth are completely voluntary on the part of the church member.
- E. Now, is giving a problem in FBC? Why am I addressing it? Mainly, I am addressing this subject because chapter 16 comes after chapter 15! It is just part of our normal walk through entire books of the Bible.

More to the point of the question, on the positive side, I can say that the Lord has covered all of our church’s needs now for 40 years. All the time I have been here we have never lacked God’s supply to do God’s work. Certainly, we could do more work for the Lord, and I think we could do more with the same money, somehow, but it would probably take more volunteer hours! We always want to look to improve our stewardship, but I do not see how we could be credibly charged with waste. Still, we could optimize a couple areas of the finances and are working on that.

On the negative side, I do not know for sure in every case if there is a problem in giving, because I do not look at everyone's giving. I see a check in the mail from time to time, or someone hands me their offering check because they were late into the basket, but other than that, I do not really know who gives what. There is a benefit in this for me. But there is also a downside—that I may be unable to help a family or two that are not giving diligently to the Lord. Perhaps they are lazy, or wasteful, or have wrong priorities, or resentful about something that they should deal with, or simply do not understand the place that giving has in Christian worship. Maybe they do not understand that the church does not run on fumes, that ministry costs money, that missionaries many times cannot work another job legally, not to mention practically.

Perhaps potential givers are simply poor stewards: they make many thousands of dollars per month but are giving very little to the Lord's work. I have known cases of people who make a very generous living who cannot seem to get their financial house in order because of lack of self-control. If you need financial counsel, I am available to work with you.

#### **IV. Transporting the Gift, v. 3-4**

- A. Proper financial accounting standards should be observed so that neither the donors nor outside observers could be concerned about theft, laundering, embezzlement, etc.
- B. The matter of proper standards applies in Corinth in that the church would decide who should carry the funds to Jerusalem (v. 3). They were to approve certain ones to carry the gift to Jerusalem based on their solid reputation to do the job properly.
- C. There is an interpretive question as to whether the letters are from the church or from the apostle Paul. In either case, the transporters would take letters of introduction with them so that those on the receiving end could get an idea of who these people were, what their connection was to the churches and the apostle Paul, that they were trustworthy, etc.

- D. The church would be responsible to send men who were trusted in money matters, but also who would be able to give greetings and encourage the brothers on the receiving end of the gift.
- E. Finally, the apostle said that if it seemed fitting to all that he also go, he would travel along with them. This would lessen the need for introductory letters, and may have strengthened the impact of the gift. The result on the receiving end would be thanksgivings to God (2 Cor. 9:11). The exact parameters that would make that decision “fitting” are not specified.

## **Conclusion**

From time to time, specific instructions on the matter of giving need to be reviewed in the life of the church. We have done that, and I pray it serves as a reminder to us that we are called to support God’s work. Christians are called to regularly give to support the work of the church, which includes missions, benevolence, support for pastor(s), local ministries, etc. If we do not do so, how do you suppose it will happen? No government support is forthcoming; no church welfare exists; there are no money trees in the back yard! We would simply cease to exist after a while.

More to the point of this passage, believers who are struggling will appreciate a helping hand from a church, whether they live nearby or far away.

The apostle Paul reminded the Gentile Christians in Rom 15:27 that it was an obligation upon them to support the Jewish Christians who in effect had sent out the gospel to them. That was an obligation in a particular situation; but the principle is a good one that we should remember those Christians with whom we have some level of connection, whether near or far, and help them. We do not and cannot know about every group of Christians, but those of whom we do know can be the objects of our concern, prayers, and benevolence.

MAP