

About the Collection

About the Collection (Part 3)

1 Corinthians 16:1-4

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Scripture

Two weeks ago I began a sermon series *About the Collection*. My intention is to preach four messages on the biblical principles of financial stewardship with respect to giving to the Lord. I would like to reiterate that these messages are intended to help you who are Christians grow in this vital area of discipleship. I have no desire to lay guilt trips on you. I want to motivate you on the basis of God's Word to obedience in this area of your Christian life.

By the way, most of the material for this series of messages comes from John MacArthur, whose teaching on the subject I have found particularly helpful.

So, with that in mind, let's read 1 Corinthians 16:1-4. In this text Paul gives us principles about the collection:

¹ Now about the collection for God's people: Do what I told the Galatian churches to do. ² On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made. ³ Then, when I arrive, I will give letters of introduction to the men you approve and send them with your gift to Jerusalem. ⁴ If it seems advisable for me to go also, they will accompany me. (1 Corinthians 16:1-4)

Introduction

Kim Peek is the man who inspired the 1988 film *Rain Man* about an autistic savant with astounding mathematical skills. Peek is what doctors call a mega-savant. A savant possesses remarkable expertise in 1 to 3 subjects. Peek is an expert in at least 15, including history, sports, space, music, and geography. No one in the world is thought to possess a brain as extraordinary as Peek's. He has total recall of 9,000 books. It was discovered that each of

Peek's eyes can read a separate page simultaneously, absorbing every word. In fact, a page that might take you or me 3 minutes to read, Peek can read in 10 seconds and *never* forget!

Kim Peek once went to a performance of Shakespeare's play, *Twelfth Night*. As the play was ending, Peek stood up and said out loud, "You've got to stop it! Stop it! Stop it!"

It turned out that the actor had skipped the second to the last verse of the play. The actor then apologized saying, "The verses are so much alike I didn't think it would matter."

Peek responded, "It mattered to William Shakespeare, and it should matter to you."¹

That is how we should feel about the Word of God. God has given us his Word, the Scriptures. And if it mattered to God to give us his Word correctly, then it should matter to us too that we understand, interpret and apply his Word correctly too.

The way we handle finances is one of the most important barometers of how we handle God's Word. The way we handle our finances is one of the most important indicators of our spiritual well-being. The Christian is one who seeks to love God with all of his heart, soul, mind, and strength (Mark 12:30). And to the extent that finances—or anything else, for that matter—rivals his love for God, to that extent he is struggling in his discipleship. And so these messages are designed to help you grow in your love for God.

Review

Let me briefly review what I have covered so far.

I. The Purpose of Giving (16:1)

First, we looked at the purpose of giving.

The purpose of giving as stated in verse 1 is "**for God's people,**" that is, for the church. The church is to fund its own ministry

¹ "The Original Rain Man," *The Week* (3-4-05), 40-41.

and needs. More specifically, as you study Scripture you discover that all giving falls essentially into two categories: to support the ministry of the Word and the ministry of mercy.

II. The Period of Giving (16:2a)

Second, the period of giving.

Our giving is to be **“on the first day of every week”** (v. 2a). It is to be systematic, week after week, so that we come to grips with the stewardship of our money. Even though we may only give once a month, if we receive a pay check once a month, we should nevertheless be sensitive to the stewardship of our finances every week.

III. The Participants in Giving (16:2b)

Third, the participants in giving.

Paul says that **“each one of you should set aside a sum of money”** (v. 2b). No-one is exempt from giving. No matter how poor you are, if you have *anything*, you have *something* to give. Giving is to be a spontaneous, cheerful response of a loving heart toward God who, in his grace, has given us everything.

IV. The Place of Giving (16:2c)

Fourth, the place of giving.

The Greek word for **“saving it up”** (v. 2c) is *thesaurizo*, from which we get the English word “thesaurus.” It has to do with a treasury. We are to give systematically and cheerfully to the treasury of the church on the first day of the week. The money collected is then to be distributed by godly leaders.

Lesson

Now, let’s look at the next principle **“about the collection.”**

V. The Proportion of Giving (16:2d)

Fifth, let's look at the proportion of giving.

The apostle Paul said in verse 2d: "On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money **in keeping with his income**, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made."

What proportion of our money are we to give? How much are we to give? The common answer is that we are to give 10%. Is that how much we should give?

This is perhaps the most vexing of all questions regarding financial stewardship.

Let's examine Scripture closely to learn what it teaches on this important question. Let's look at giving before Moses, giving from Moses to Jesus, and giving from Jesus to the present.

Giving can generally be broken into two categories: freewill giving and required giving. Let's use these two categories as we study giving in Scripture.

A. *Giving Before Moses*

First, let's look at giving before Moses.

1. Freewill Giving

And let's start with freewill giving.

Some people say that prior to Moses the people gave a tithe (which means a "tenth") to God. They're right.

For example, Abram gave a tenth to Melchizedek. We read about this in Genesis 14:18-20: "Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. He was priest of God Most High, and he blessed Abram, saying, 'Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth. And blessed be God Most High, who

delivered your enemies into your hand.’ *Then Abram gave him a tenth of everything.*”

Jacob also gave a tenth to the Lord. After Jacob fled from his father’s house, he spent a night at a place he called Bethel. There he had an encounter with God. At the end of this encounter, we read the following in Genesis 28:20-22: “Then Jacob made a vow, saying, ‘If God will be with me and will watch over me on this journey I am taking and will give me food to eat and clothes to wear so that I return safely to my father’s house, then the Lord will be my God and this stone that I have set up as a pillar will be God’s house, *and of all that you give me I will give you a tenth.*””

So, because of these passages, some people say, “You see, the tenth (or tithe) was before the Mosaic law, so it must supersede the Mosaic law and still be valid for us today.”

However, it’s interesting to go back and take a second look at giving before Moses. Abram gave a tenth *one time* in his whole life, for we never have a record that he ever gave a tenth again. Jacob also gave a tenth *one time*.

Furthermore, these two were the only ones who ever did it, in spite of the fact that there were many offerings given at that time.

From Cain and Abel’s first offering, all the way through all of the offerings ever given before Moses, there are only two times when it was a tenth. And in neither case was the tenth commanded or binding as a standard for giving by God. These were what we can call “freewill gifts.”

2. Required Giving

On the other hand, there was required giving before Moses.

In Genesis 41 and 47 God required giving. He told the inhabitants of Egypt through Joseph that there was going to be a famine. God said that in order to take care of the needs of the people, Joseph must command everyone to give one-fifth of all that the land produced (Genesis 41:34; 47:24-26). What percent is that? 20%! God gave 20% as a standard for giving for one reason—

taxation. He was funding the government of Egypt so that it could meet the needs of its people.

That is the only indication that an amount was ever prescribed before Moses.

All other offerings were completely freewill offerings.

B. *Giving from Moses to Jesus*

Now, let's look at giving from the time of Moses to Jesus.

1. Required Giving

Let's begin this time by looking at required giving.

As one studies the texts of Scripture, one discovers that from the time of Moses to the time of Jesus there were in fact three annual tithes in effect. The first tithe was called the *Levites' tithe*, the second tithe was the *festival tithe*, and the third tithe was the *poor tithe*. Let's look at each of these tithes more closely.

The first tithe was the Levites' tithe. The nation was divided into twelve tribes. One whole tribe, the Levites, served as the nation's priests and did not receive land as an inheritance. The tithe from all the other tribes was a taxation that went to supply the needs of the Levites. And so Numbers 18:20-21 says: "The LORD said to Aaron, 'You will have no inheritance in their land, nor will you have any share among them; I am your share and your inheritance among the Israelites. I give to the Levites all the tithes in Israel as their inheritance in return for the work they do while serving at the Tent of Meeting.'"

The second tithe was the festival tithe. This tithe was to be brought to the central sanctuary appointed by God. The purpose of this tithe was to stimulate devotion to the Lord and national unity among all the people. It was like a national potluck because it made everybody share. We read about this in Deuteronomy 12:4-7: "You must not worship the LORD your God in their way. But you are to seek the place the LORD your God will choose from among

all your tribes to put his Name there for his dwelling. To that place you must go; there bring your burnt offerings and sacrifices, your tithes and special gifts, what you have vowed to give and your freewill offerings, and the firstborn of your herds and flocks. There, in the presence of the LORD your God, you and your families shall eat and shall rejoice in everything you have put your hand to, because the LORD your God has blessed you.”

The third tithe was the poor tithe. Deuteronomy 14:28-29 says: “At the end of every three years, bring all the tithes of that year’s produce and store it in your towns, so that the Levites (who have no allotment or inheritance of their own) and the aliens, the fatherless and the widows who live in your towns may come and eat and be satisfied, and so that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hands.” Here is a third tithe that went to the poor. This was welfare, and it was required every third year.

So we have 10%, 10%, and 3 1/3% (that is 10 % every third year) that was required by God. So when someone says that the Jews gave 10% a year, that’s just plain wrong. They gave at least 23% per year. And all of that was required giving. The tithe was never related to freewill giving; it was a required taxation.

2. Freewill Giving

Now, let’s look at freewill giving from Moses to Jesus.

You may say, “Was there any freewill giving?” Yes, but it was over and above their taxation.

Exodus 25:1-2 says: “The LORD said to Moses, ‘Tell the Israelites to bring me an offering. You are to receive the offering for me from each man whose heart prompts him to give.’”

Now this doesn’t refer to one of their tithes. It was whatever they were willing to give from their hearts. That’s a beautiful spirit, and that’s the way it had always been. God didn’t tell Abram how much to give when he was joyous; he just gave what was in his heart. God didn’t tell Abel what to give; he just gave as his heart prompted him to give. God didn’t tell Noah what to give

when he made an offering to God after the flood; he gave as his heart prompted him to give.

And that's the same principle in this passage: *Give as your heart prompts you to give.*

Exodus 35:5, 21; 36:5-7 says: "From what you have, take an offering for the LORD. Everyone who is willing is to bring to the LORD an offering . . . and everyone who was willing and whose heart moved him came and brought an offering to the LORD for the work on the Tent of Meeting, for all its service, and for the sacred garments. . . and they said to Moses, 'The people are bringing more than enough for doing the work the LORD commanded to be done.' Then Moses gave an order and they sent this word throughout the camp: 'No man or woman is to make anything else as an offering for the sanctuary.' And so the people were restrained from bringing more, because what they already had was more than enough to do all the work."

Isn't that great? I've often thought of the day when we could come to church and say, "Folks, there will be no more offerings because we have too much!" It ought to be so, because it was then. They didn't need a prescription or an amount; all they needed was a heart that was willing, and they gave. They were investing with a God who could not be out-given.

And so you see, the only time the tithe ever came into play was in taxation, not in freewill giving.

C. *Giving from Jesus to the Present*

Now, notice giving from the time of Jesus to the present.

1. Required Giving

Let's begin by examining required giving from Jesus to the present.

Romans 13:6-7 says: "This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to govern-

ing. Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor.” It doesn’t say “IRS” here, but the people at the IRS are God’s servants. God requires us to give taxes to the government.

Interestingly, the New Testament says exactly the same thing as the Old Testament as far as required giving is concerned.

2. Freewill Giving

Now, let’s look at freewill giving from Jesus to the present.

2 Corinthians 9:6-8 says: “Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.”

God won’t just give us back the spiritual blessing. He’ll make sure we have all sufficiency in all things. Verse 10 says: “Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness.” We will receive the physical bread and the spiritual fruits of righteousness by investing with God.

Romans 8:32 says that God “did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?” God is unspeakably generous in giving us his Son who bore our sin. God is unfathomably gracious in giving us all things. And the response of the Christian who has truly comprehended the generosity of God never asks, “How much can I keep for myself?” but rather, “How much can I give to my God?”

Conclusion

So what does Paul say is the proportion you are to give in 1 Corinthians 16:2? You are to give exactly what you determine to

give in your heart. For as Paul said in 2 Corinthians 9:7: “Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.” How much are you to give to the Lord? Whatever you want.

Now some of you may struggle with this. You say, “Pastor, that doesn’t tell me how much I am supposed to give.” Well, for those of you who would like a guideline, I would suggest that you give 10% of your income. Start with that as a base and work up from there.

Frank Barker was the founding pastor of Briarwood Presbyterian Church in Birmingham, AL. I believe he was the pastor of that church for about 40 years before he retired a few years ago. The Lord wonderfully blessed the ministry of Frank Barker. Briarwood Presbyterian Church is one of the largest churches in the PCA, with about 8,000 communicant members. They have started scores of ministries impacting the city, region, and the world with the gospel of God’s grace. In fact, I read just this week in *The Barna Update* that the city of Birmingham has one of the highest percentages of Christians in the nation. I have no doubt that part of the reason for that statistic is Briarwood Presbyterian Church and Frank Barker. Anyway, Frank started by giving 10% to the Lord. Over the years, he and his family maintained a very simple lifestyle so that by the time he retired he gave 75% of his income to the Lord! God wonderfully blessed Frank for his cheerful giving.

How often are you to give to the Lord? Weekly, dealing with giving on a regular basis.

Where are you to give to the Lord? Into the church so that it can be distributed by those who have spiritual oversight.

For what reasons are you to give to the church? So that the church might support its own, to meet their needs both spiritually and physically.

May God help us all to be cheerful givers and to give from a willing heart. Amen.

Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and **membership** in his church family,
develop them to Christlike **maturity**,
equip them for their **ministry** in the church
and life **mission** in the world,
in order to **magnify** God's name.*

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