

*1 Corinthians 16:1-4***PREFACE**

The apostle Paul, in the longest chapter of his letter to the Corinth church, has just completed an extended treatise on resurrection—the certainty of Christ’s resurrection, which establishes the certainty of *our* bodily resurrection, and then detailing the nature of that body and the manner in which it will be raised. It is all about the believer’s resurrection that will take place, from Paul’s point in history, at least more than two thousand years in the future. It is all about the future.

Then, as the Corinthians hearing this letter are lost in their thoughts about the end times, like a splash of cold water Paul abruptly changes the subject with, “Now concerning the collection for the saints...” Suddenly the church, and we, are snapped back to the pragmatic issues of the here and now. Yet, as John MacArthur points out,

The life to come is far from unrelated to living here and now. Whenever God gives us a glimpse of the end times or of heaven it is always for the purpose of helping us to live more faithfully on earth.

In his second letter, Peter offers a grim picture of events leading to God’s final judgment of man. Then, in his description of the “new heavens and a new earth” he asks the question, “...what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness” (v3:11).

Read 2 Peter 3:14.

The command to remain “diligent” is not far afield from Paul’s command in Chapter Sixteen to “Be on the alert, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong” (v16:13). So Paul will now close this letter with a number of “housekeeping” instructions, words of encouragement and affection—but first, about giving to a special fund.

Read 1 Corinthians 16:1-4.

v1

Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I directed the churches of Galatia, so do you also.

For the fifth time in this letter Paul signals to the Corinthians, and us, that he is about to respond to something the church requested in their letter to him. Each time he does this with *peri de* (“Now concerning”; NIV, “Now about”).

The likeliest situation is that Paul had earlier mentioned this “collection for the saints” to them, and they had followed up with specific questions regarding its implementation. That this is not something new to the Corinthians that he is just now raising is evidenced by the lack of details here; we can safely assume that it was not necessary because they were already aware of the plan. And since he nowhere else uses the word “collection” (*logias*) to describe this offering, it can be assumed that this is the word the Corinthians used in their inquiry to him. The meaning of the word leans toward the *act* of collecting, the “taking up” of the contributions, rather than the funds themselves or the purpose behind it. This explains why Paul now gives explicit instructions for the “taking up” of the funds.

We know from his letters to the Romans, to the Galatians, to the Thessalonians, and the *second* letter to the Corinthians (8:1 to 9:15) that this was to be a churches-wide collection for the poor in the Jerusalem church. That church—thought of as the “mother church” in Christendom—was impoverished (2 Corinthians 9:12) and suffering persecution (1 Thessalonians 2:14). So Paul had been organizing a collection for the Jerusalem church in a number of the churches he had started. And, in a refreshing contrast to so much of what we have learned about the Corinthians, on the whole they were not at all reluctant to give.

Read 2 Corinthians 8:10-11.

v2

On the first day of every week each one of you is to put aside and save, as he may prosper, so that no collections be made when I come.

This verse contains, I believe, not just wise, practical counsel for the Corinthians, but for us as well. As we break this down into its component parts, we will look first at what Paul is instructing the Corinthians, and why; then make application for us today.

On the first day of every week...

If, as the text seems to state, the members are to set aside their accumulated offering privately, why does Paul specify that they do this “on the first day” (*sabbaton*) rather than the more general “every week”? The explanation lies in the fact that, for the early church, that phrase held special meaning. The word “Sunday,” which we use, has pagan roots. All four gospels mark the day of Christ’s resurrection with the phrase “the first day of the week,” and, accordingly, it was on the first day of every week that the church gathered to worship, and to remember the death and resurrection of the Lord in the eating together of the Lord’s Supper. Setting aside their offering, even a small amount, regularly each week made it easier to accumulate a substantial sum, and doing this on the special Lord’s Day could be seen as extra incentive to give sacrificially—and with the correct motive.

It is not our custom, at least in most evangelical denominations, to celebrate the Lord's Supper every week. Likewise, for many of us—especially those in business—*Monday* is often seen as the “first day of the week.” That does not, however, prevent us from treating the day we *do* gather for worship as a special and holy day, dedicated to God and His Christ. We call it “the Lord's Day,” but is it? Is it in our heart? Is it reflected in our thoughts and activities of the day?

each one of you...as he may prosper...

As we have seen, the Corinth church already suffered from its divisions, its factions—not least between the wealthy elite and the poor. Here Paul says that each person in the church, rich or poor, was to give, privately, according to their “prospering.” The phrase can rightly be translated (as the NIVs suggest) “out of your profits,” but considering the mixed membership of this church—some of whom would be too poor to have any profit at all—the idea is that if the Lord had prospered them *in any way* that week, they should set aside an amount in accordance to that blessing. The Christian view, based on God's word, is that we are not just created by God, but created for His pleasure, and that whatever we have and are in this world has come from Him.

Read James 1:17.

Note: The NIVs offer a poor translation of this with “in keeping with his/your income.” This was not a regular tithe, but a special offering to be based on the work of a generous God in the individual's life. The word translated “prosper” or “prospered” in the other translations has nothing to do with the regular salary one brings home from work.

Since all of that with which He entrusts us belongs to God, we are called to give with liberality, and with a heart not of generosity, as if we are *generously* giving to Him and His kingdom, but with a heart of gratitude, thanksgiving, and praise for the blessings He has graciously and generously poured out on us. This is what Paul is telling the Corinthians to do, every week, to contribute to the offering for the saints in Jerusalem.

put aside and save,

From this we get the picture of each member of the church regularly setting aside *at home* the monies for his offering for Jerusalem. The word *thesaurizon*, meaning to lay up, store up, save up, is directed toward “each one of you”—not the church as a whole. The phrase is *par' heautō tithetō thēsaurizōn*, that is, in the KJV, “lay by him in store,” and virtually all agree that this describes the individual saving the funds at home. What better habit could we teach the young—not to mention ourselves—than to regularly, personally set aside monies to contribute to the offering plate. Even pennies can represent the gladness in our hearts for what the Lord has done for us each day.

...so that no collections be made when I come.

There does not seem to be an obvious reason why Paul requests this. The two possible reasons that I prefer are,

1. that Paul knows the chances for a larger sum (thus making the trip to Jerusalem worthwhile) are better if people give on a regular basis over a period of time, rather than all at the last minute (**Fee**); and
2. by handing the total amount accumulated to Paul when he comes, he has no idea who gave how much to the fund (**Garland**).

v3

When I arrive, whomever you may approve, I will send them with letters to carry your gift to Jerusalem;

How Paul sees this collection is apparent with his choice of the familiar word *charin* (*charis* = grace), translated “gift” in our versions (KJV, “liberality”). This was not a regimented tithe, nor a regular offering, but an act of grace from the churches to another church in need. But this verse also reinforces the fact that this “grace” is not being dictated or (we would say) micro-managed by the apostle. Each person on his or her own is to decide how much to give, and Paul leaves it to each autonomous church to decide who it would have carry the offering to Jerusalem.

We see in our different versions two ways the Greek can be interpreted:

ESV: And when I arrive, I will send those whom you accredit by letter to carry your gift to Jerusalem. (emphasis added)

NIV: Then, when I arrive, I will give letters of introduction to the men you approve and send them with your gift to Jerusalem. (emphasis added)

That is, does the individual church write the letters of introduction, or does Paul. It would make more sense for the apostle himself, who would have a more influential standing before the mother church, to supply the letters. In this our two primary commentators favor the latter (as seen in the NIVs), as does M. R. Vincent.

Vincent: The latter is preferable. The givers are to choose the bearers of the collection; Paul, as the originator and apostolic steward of the collection, will send the money.

The NASB and CSB, for once, leave it ambiguous.

v4

and if it is fitting for me to go also, they will go with me.

We learn from Paul’s letter to the Romans (15:26-27) that the Corinthians did collect funds that made it to Jerusalem. But we learn from his next letter to the Corinthians that it required a measure of cajoling, and two visits from Titus, to bring it to completion. Romans 15:25 informs us that Paul did go. Imagine the joy in the Jerusalem church as the emissaries from all these churches trooped in with their assistance!