

"CONCERNING THE COLLECTION"

"Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye. Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come." I Corinthians 16:1-2.

Immediately after the discussion of the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead in chapter fifteen, there is the transition to the theme of the collection. This is part of the work of the Lord, and is to be done in the inspiration of the resurrection hope. There is no gulf between doctrine and duty. Rather, there is the most intimate union between the hope of heaven and the details of common life on earth. Practical benevolence is doctrine demonstrated, or the blossom run into the fruit.

Very few interests in human life can be separated from the consideration of money. Money is the first necessity of governments. In business life, in industrial pursuits and in professional life pecuniary considerations are prominent, and perhaps paramount. Money is an important factor in the realm of religion also. While there are some church members who object to associating money with the loftiest of human interests, no way has ever been found to exclude finances from the work of the Lord's churches.

Paul was concerned about the collection, and he wanted the Corinthian Christians to be like him in that respect. Every true Christian is concerned about the collection. He is part and parcel of its success or failure. God is vitally concerned about the collection. He is concerned with the salvation of man, so He has a plan. He is concerned with the financing of His earthly kingdom, so He has a program. When man accepts the program of God in any area of life success is assured. When man rejects God's program failure is inevitable.

God has a program for the collection, and only one. We see it in both the Old and New Testaments. There is essentially no difference between the stewardship message of God through the prophet in Malachi 3:7-12 and through the Apostle Paul in I Corinthians 16:1-4. Paul's instructions and admonitions to the Christians at Corinth should be accepted and practiced by every Christian who accepts the New Testament as a sufficient rule and guide for faith and practice. As we accept and contend for the teachings of God's Word on other subjects, so should we practice this grace also.

God did not leave the question of giving to the whims and fancies of men. He gave a very definite plan and set it forth clearly in the words of our text. How did God command us to give to Him and His work?

I. Periodically.

Our Lord Jesus rose from the dead "on the first day of the week"; and, in commemoration of His resurrection, the early Christians began to worship on "the first day of the week." No law changed the day of worship. No council determined it. No committee arranged it.

The Lord's Day, therefore, is a Christian institution. When we worship the Lord on the Lord's Day we proclaim His resurrection until He comes again. If you listen to the followers of Satan, you will not have any Lord's Day, any day of rest and worship and Christian service. His day is the day for worship, for reviewing His blessings upon us and for considering our obligations to Him.

The Lord's Day should be a day of rest for all men. It must be a day of worship for the Lord's people. They should assemble themselves in the place of worship on the first day of each week and praise Him, proclaim His message, practice His teachings and glorify His name. Regularity of worship is certainly enjoined in the Scriptures.

Giving is a part of worship. When we go to church for corporate worship, we should go for corporate giving also. Thus we lay our total selves, person and property, upon His altar. An obedient Christian will not attend church only once a month or twice a year. Neither will a faithful and obedient Christian give with such spasmodic irregularity. A true worshipper will no more ignore the collection plate than he will refuse to sing during the song service, or to listen reverently to the reading of the Scriptures, or to bow humbly and respectfully during prayer --- all of which are parts of one whole --- a genuine experience of worship. We frequently jest, and often fret, over the man who sleeps during the sermon. But what about the man who looks the other way when the collection plate is passed? Neither of them is participating in the worship of the hour.

In God's program there is a time for the collection --- "Upon the first day of the week." God did not say, "Upon the day that suits your convenience, once a month, or once a year," but "Upon the first day of the week." Thus He provided for the periodic needs of His work. Regularity and promptness in giving enables the church to be regular and prompt in the payment of its obligations. Periodic contributing should be worshipful, prayerful and cheerful. The collection is as much a part of the worship service as are the songs, the prayers or the Scripture reading. It should, therefore, be made worshipful and prayerful. One is in a sorry spiritual condition when he cannot contribute to the Lord's work cheerfully.

Occasionally some person, who seldom goes to church, will say, "I hate to see the collection plates stuck under our noses at every service." If the plate smelled good to him, he would like to have it passed under his nose. But it depends on what one's nature is whether a thing is fragrant or not. That nature is revealed in one's attitudes and actions.

Disbursements of money fall under two heads, namely, the payment of debts to a fellow-creature, which is an obligation that is enforced by law, and the payment of our debt of gratitude to Christ in the furthering of His work. Both duties are important. Some meet their earthly obligations with promptitude, but refuse to meet their obligations to the Lord promptly.

II. Personally.

God's plan for giving includes every individual Christian. "Let every one of you lay by him in store." There is a wholesome democracy in Christianity. The individual is not lost in the crowd. We are saved as individuals, and not in mass. We receive God's providential care as individuals, and not in mass. We must come before God as individuals, and not in mass. We must bring our gifts to Him as individuals, and not in mass. Each individual counts in the kingdom of God; and though he may be poor in this world's goods, the Lord loves him, numbers every hair of his head, notes every step of his feet, hears every cry of his soul, and takes account of every contribution of his heart and hand.

Each Christian should worship his Lord with the earnings of his own hands. It is no more possible to obey the Lord in the collection by proxy than it is to obey Him in baptism by proxy. One of the chief glories of Christianity is that it is personal. Every man, every woman, every boy and every girl, for himself or herself, should come personally, honestly, cheerfully, loyally and regularly to the treasury of the Lord's house and make a personal deposit according to the will of God, just as each one should obey the requirement of repentance and faith and baptism for himself. This includes the rich and the poor, the old and the young, the weak and the strong, the learned and the unlearned. The offering should be an act of personal worship. If God has put anything into our hands, whether it be much or little, we are to dedicate a part of it to the work of His kingdom. The offering is not a necessary evil which has been injected into our religious services, but it is an act of worship whereby we give expression to our love for God and our gratitude to Him. Since giving is a part of worship, then each person must give for himself. A father can no more give for his family than he can worship for them. No one in whose heart the love of God richly dwells wishes to be excused. If a person loves God, he will give; if he does not give, it is because of a lack of love for God.

Receiving without giving is injurious to a person. Something within him dies. Governmental policies within the last thirty years did irreparable damage to multitudes of people in this country. The worst thing that these policies did was to breed within people the attitude of respected beggars. Many adopted the attitude of "The government owes me a living." At the same time our churches have produced a lot of drones and spongers, who do not contribute enough to pay for the fuel it takes to keep the space which they occupy warm when they are in the church building. They resent being called parasites, a name which is given to those creatures which suck their subsistence out of the lives of others without handing back anything in return. Someone has defined a gentleman as a man who puts more into life than he takes out of it. He is a contributor and not a sponger. It is sinful to deprive Christians of the privilege of giving, either by failing to teach them, or by refusing them the opportunity. For our sakes God says, "Let every one of you lay by him in store."

III. Properly.

"Let every one of you lay by him in store." But where? "Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse" (Malachi 3:10). In the Old Testament the storehouse was the tabernacle or temple, and in the New Testament it was the church. It is through the church that the Christian is to channel his gifts for God's work. It is not our money which we give, but God's, and He reserves the right to tell us where and how we shall give it. Work through other organizations is not to be done with that which belongs to God. Support other types of work if you desire, but never with the tithe. God's Word plainly says, "And all the tithe of the land, whether of the seed of the land, or of the fruit of the tree, is the Lord's: it is holy unto the Lord" (Leviticus 27:30). The only proper thing to do with the tithe which is the Lord's is to bring it to the Lord's house and, as an act of worship, place it in the Lord's treasury. Those Christians who do so will have a good conscience and be happy in this practice. Those who do not experience the blessedness of giving will sooner or later taste the curse of withholding that which belongs to God.

IV. Proportionately.

"As God hath prospered him." It is the percentage, and not the gross amount, that counts with the Lord. A Christian's giving is to be in proportion to his income. God has not left the proportion to the decisions of men. He clearly designated one-tenth of all that a person gets to be set aside as holy unto the Lord. As plain a statement as can be found in God's Word is the following: "The tithe is the Lord's." That tenth is to be set apart as holy unto the Lord, and the nine-tenths which remain are to be used for the glory of the Lord.

Nobody is too poor or too rich to be excused from this minimum requirement of the Lord. John D. Rockefeller gave millions to the Lord's work, and afterwards made this significant statement, "I never would have been able to tithe the first million dollars I ever had if I had not tithed my first salary which was one dollar and fifty cents per week." As further evidence that tithing is scriptural, right and profitable, Thomas Kane of Chicago reminded us that during a two-year period the following question and offer were published in a large number of religious newspapers in the United States and Canada:

"Have you ever known anyone who was less happy, less generous, or less financially prosperous from being a tither? A 'Yes' or 'No' answer to the above question will bring you an eighty-page booklet."

In response to this query a total of more than ten thousand "No" replies were received, but not one "Yes."

Christian giving must be in proportion to ability --- "as God hath prospered him." Christians are not to give for the glory of self, nor for the glory of their church, but for the glory of the Lord. Our giving is an accurate expression of our love and gratitude to Christ.

V. Purposefully.

"That there be no gatherings when I come." Apart from the spiritual benefits received by the giver, there is the matter of provision for the work of the Lord. The purpose of the method which is set forth in our text is that the Lord's work might be cared for, that His obedient children might be blessed, and that His servant, the Apostle Paul, might not be embarrassed: "that there be no gatherings when I come."

If the tithe of the income of all the church members was placed in the Lord's treasury on each Lord's Day, as He has commanded, there would not be any need for special calls to support kingdom enterprises. This is the Lord's plan. It has worked every time and in every place that it has ever been tried. Moreover, no Christian cause ever suffered when God's people followed His plan. When God's method is followed deficits do not occur. Those who practice the plan which God sets forth in the Scriptures are happy, successful and useful Christians. Those who have given themselves to the Lord and who love Him do not object to scriptural giving. When people give themselves their money always follows. Self and substance go together. Spirituality and liberality are inseparable.