

A Generous Contribution

1 Cor 16:1-4

I. INTRODUCTION.

- A. A mother wanted to teach her daughter a moral lesson.
 1. She gave the little girl a quarter and a dollar for church.
 2. “Put whichever one you want in the collection plate & keep the other for yourself,” she told the girl.
 - a. When they were coming out of church, the mother asked her daughter which amount she had given.
 - b. “Well,” said the little girl, “I was going to give the dollar, but just before the collection the man in the pulpit said that we should all be cheerful givers. I knew I’d be a lot more cheerful if I gave the quarter, so I did!”
- B. There can be little doubt but that God wants us to be cheerful givers.
 1. “Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver” (2 Cor 9:7).
 2. There can also be little doubt but that the idea of giving is controversial.
 - a. We do not, as a rule, like to discuss money.
 - 1) Allow a government agency to announce that it will publish the salaries of its employees & watch the firestorm that erupts.
 - 2) How many have heard comments similar to: “If that preachers talks about money one more time, I’m going to quit going there.”
 - b. While we may not like to discuss giving, the truth is that “God loves a cheerful giver” & the inspired pages instruct us much on money.
 - 1) In Matthew, Mark, & Luke, 1 out of every 6 verses deals with money.
 - 2) Out of the 29 parables Jesus told, 16 deal with a person & his money.
 3. Thus, it’s imperative that we talk about money.
- C. In the passage before us this morning, Paul calls upon the Corinthian Christians to make “A GENEROUS CONTRIBUTION.”
 1. The contribution Paul talks about here is not the same contribution we give on a weekly basis.
 - a. It cannot be the same contribution we make, for Paul wants all the money collected before he comes & the church was to select men to take this money to take this money to Jerusalem.
 - b. The contribution Paul discusses in this passage was for the needy saints in Jerusalem.
 - 1) Shortly after the conversion of the first Gentiles, the Spirit revealed through his prophets that there would be a great famine: “One of them named Agabus stood up and foretold by the spirit that there would be a great famine over all the world (this took place in the days of Claudius). So the disciples determined, everyone according to his ability, to send relief to the brothers living in Judea. And they did so, ending it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul” (Acts 11:28-30).
 - 2) Paul seems to have spent a considerable portion of his ministry collecting this money to take to Jerusalem.
 - a) When his encounter with James, Cephas, & John, Paul records: “Only, they asked us to remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do” (Gal 2:10). While we cannot say certainly that this refers to collecting for the needy saints in Jerusalem, it’s certainly plausible that remembering the poor refers to the famine situation.
 - b) As Paul concludes Romans, he informs the brethren: “At present, however, I am going to Jerusalem bringing aid to the saints. For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make some contribution for the poor among the saints at Jerusalem” (Rm 15:25-26).

2. While the contribution referenced here is a good bit different from the contribution we carry out today, there are many similarities. While we think about “A GENEROUS CONTRIBUTION,” we see A COMMON CONTRIBUTION, A CONTUING CONTRIBUTION, A CAPABLE CONTRIBUTION & A CLEAR CONTRIBUTION.

II. A COMMON CONTRIBUTION, vv 1-2a.

- A. “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.”
- B. This is A COMMON CONTRIBUTION, for Paul directs churches & Christians to participate in this act together.
- C. Paul directed the church at Corinth to do precisely what he had instructed the churches of Galatia to do.
 1. The brethren at Corinth were not singled out to make this contribution, but multiple churches were instructed to make this same contribution.
 2. As you read Paul’s Epistles, you really get the impression that several congregations were involved in this work.
 - a. We know from this text that the churches of Galatia were involved in this contribution— Notice also that Paul refers to the churches of Galatia; there was more than one congregation in Galatia taking up this contribution.
 - b. Paul also accepted a contribution from the churches in Macedonia—“We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia” (2 Cor 8:1)—Again, notice the use of “churches,” not “church.”
 - c. The church in Antioch was the first church to send relief to Jerusalem (Acts 11:27-30).
 - d. Paul mentions in Rm 15:26 that Achaia was pleased to make a contribution to the saints in Jerusalem. Corinth was in Achaia, so this passage references the Corinthian gift, but it’s certainly possible that other congregation in Achaia gave to this relief effort also.
 3. The fact that other congregations were being asked to contribute to this effort likely made an impact on the Corinthians.
 - a. As you read through First Corinthians, it becomes quite clear that these disciples had a serious problem with pride.
 - 1) Whether they were arguing over who had baptized whom, taking one another to court, refusing to share at the Lord’s Supper, or boasting in their spiritual gifts, many of the Corinthians thought they were God’s gift to humanity.
 - 2) Paul, as he does throughout the entire Epistle, levels the playing field & writes, “As I directed the churches of Galatia, so you also are to do.”
 - a) The churches in Galatia weren’t any better than the church at Corinth & the church at Corinth wasn’t any better than the churches in Galatia.
 - b) They are doing exactly the same thing.
 - b. When we bring our contribution here on the first day of the week, we do what congregations of God’s people throughout the world are doing.
 - 1) Regardless of where you are, if you worship with God’s people on the Lord’s Day a contribution is going to be taken because of these instructions.
 - 2) While people get nervous when you start talking about money, we know that our giving is what all faithful & able Christians throughout the world are doing.
 - 3) When we get a report from Fedrico, he will mention the amount of the contribution & CB often mentions that when he reads Brother Fedrico’s report. While those brethren in Panama aren’t able to give as much as we, they, in their poverty, are participating in A COMMON CONTRIBUTION.
- D. A GENEROUS CONTRIBUTION is also A COMMON CONTRIBUTION in that all members of the congregation participate.
 1. Paul says: “On the first day of every week, *each of you* is to put something side and store it up, as he may prosper.”
 2. In the ancient world, it was quite common to have wealthy people serve as benefactors for major projects.

- a. If you were a poet, you'd find someone to pay you to write poetry; if you were an artist, you'd find someone to pay you to paint.
- b. Christians even used patrons for their work: "I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant of the church at Cenchreae, that you may welcome her in the Lord in a way worthy of the saints, and help her in whatever she may need from you, for she has been a patron of many and of myself as well" (Rm 16:1-2).
3. But, Paul does not tell the wealthy in Corinth to contribute.
 - a. I'm confident that one reason Paul doesn't just tell the wealthy to contribute goes back to the pride of the Corinthians.
 - b. The other reason would obviously be that no one Christian can fulfill the obligations of another. Specifically about the individual's responsibility to give, Paul writes: "Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Cor 9:7).
4. People do not like to be singled out as different or unusual.
 - a. One of the things we have learned from church growth research is that the best way to get people to fill out visitor cards is to have **everyone** in the congregation fill out an attendance card. That way visitors don't feel uncomfortable or singled out.
 - b. Paul does that here with the contribution—It's common for all churches & all Christians participate.

III. A CONTINUING CONTRIBUTION, v 2.

- A. "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."
- B. This was A CONTUING COLLECTION, for it was to be taken on "the first day of every week."
 1. It is unfortunate that the KJV does not put "every" here.
 2. In Gr, the preposition is distributive—which means, quite simply, that Paul references **every** first day of the week without exception.
- C. Why does Paul here call for A CONTINUING CONTRIBUTION?
 1. Paul says that he doesn't want collections to be made when he came.
 2. I have often read this to mean that Paul didn't want to wait around while the Corinthians made their contributions, but the more I've read this text, the more I'm convinced Paul uses solid logic.
 - a. If the Corinthians set aside some each week, they will be able to set aside more than if they wait until Paul comes to set aside their funds.
 - b. It is simply a matter of good budgeting.
 - 1) How easy would it be to save for retirement if you started the day before you retired? How easy would it be to send your children to college if the day before they left you scavenged the house to find enough loose change to pay for their tuition?
 - 2) I have a few bills I pay on every single week because it is much easier to do that than to pay the entire bill all at once.
 - c. Paul is going to be able to collect much more for the saints in Jerusalem if the Christians in Corinth set aside money weekly than if he waits until he arrives & then announces that he wants to take a collection to Jerusalem.
- D. Scripture teaches the prudence of storing up.
 1. After Joseph interrupts Pharaoh's dream of the coming famine, Joseph says, "Let them gather all the food of these good years that are coming and store up grain under the authority of Pharaoh for food in the cities, and let them keep it. That food shall be a reserve for the land against the seven years of famine that are to occur in the land of Egypt, so that the land may not perish through the famine" (Gn 41:35-36). Joseph knew it wasn't wise to wait until the famine came to find food.
 2. "Go to the ant, O sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise. Without having any chief, officer, or ruler, she prepares her bread in summer and gathers her food in harvest" (Prov 6:6-8). The ant stores up for the winter.
- E. What do we learn here? The power of budgeting.

1. Financially, one of the wisest things anyone can do is to budget, to spend all your money on paper before you ever spend a dime.
2. Before Tammy or I even contemplate going to the bank to cash a check, I've made a budget, Tammy & I have discussed it, and we've agreed to stick to it.
3. Budgeting comes into play as we think about storing up our contribution.
 - a. If I'm to set something aside, I've budgeted. No matter how good the sale is, I'm not spending my contribution. No matter how tired I am & how good that grill at Longhorn smells, I'm not spending my contribution.
 - b. If I'm setting something aside, I'm not looking through my wallet or digging in my purse to find a buck to put in the collection plate. I've budgeted. I'm ready.
4. Are you budgeting & ready to give?

IV. A CAPABLE CONTRIBUTION, v 2b.

- A. "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."
- B. This is A CAPABLE CONTRIBUTION, for each is to give according to how he has prospered.
 1. The wisdom of God in simple texts never ceases to amaze me!
 - a. The Corinthians had much class warfare.
 - 1) About the Lord's Supper, Paul writes, "In eating, each one goes ahead with his own meal. One goes hungry, another gets drunk. What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and **humiliate those who have nothing?** What shall I say to you? Shall I commend you in this? No, I will not" (1 Cor 11:21-22).
 - 2) I know of some New Testament scholars who argue that the class envy was the root of all the problems in Corinth.
 - b. Thus, could you imagine the situation in Corinth if the Spirit had guided Paul to write, "Give 25% of your salary"?
 - 1) The rich would likely have brought their large sums & placed them before the congregation quite loudly—quite like what Jesus saw as he sat in the temple (Mk 12).
 - 2) The poor would have been embarrassed & it would have exacerbated the problems in Corinth.
 2. The truth is that God expects us to use our abilities in his service.
 - a. About the master doling out his talents to his servants, we read: "To one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability" (Mt 25:15).
 - b. When Agabus first told the Christians in Antioch about the coming famine, "the disciples determined, everyone according to his ability, to send relief to the brothers living in Judea" (Acts 11:29).
- C. Could you imagine a church today where we were to give a certain amount?
 1. Those who could give that amount, feeling quite smug, would rub it in the noses of those who couldn't & those who could not give that amount would feel like inferior to those who could.
 2. Those who could give large sums could run the church. If those rich folk wanted the church to a path toward error, the elders might feel powerless to stop it.
 3. But, we are to give according to our ability.
- D. Are we giving A CAPABLE CONTRIBUTION? Are we giving according to our ability?
 1. I fear that all too often the idea of giving according to our ability is nothing but a cop-out for us not to give generously.
 2. Yes, the text says we are to give according to our ability. But, do we?
 - a. Do we have enough money to eat at Red Lobster after the service but only enough to drop a dollar or two in the collection plate?
 - b. Do we have enough money to have all the latest gadgets from iPods to GPS devices but only enough to give five dollars a week?
 - c. That is **NOT** giving as we have prospered!

V. A CLEAR CONTRIBUTION, vv 3-4.

- A. This is A CLEAR CONTRIBUTION, for it is transparent—the church knows how the money is being used.
- B. When Paul arrives at the church in Corinth, he will send those whom they chose to Jerusalem with the gift.
 - 1. From reading 1 & 2 Corinthians, it certainly seems that there was some bad blood between Paul & those brethren.
 - 2. Can you imagine Paul's taking the money to Jerusalem by himself?
 - a. What did Paul really do with that money?
 - b. I bet Paul's not making tents anymore? He's taken all that money we stored up & living a good life now.
 - 3. Not anyone would take this money, but only those men whom they church accredited. Such accrediting would have three major benefits:
 - a. First, the brethren would know who was taking the money. They would be able to select men who met whatever qualifications they chose; therefore, they could have assurance the money was used as it was designated.
 - b. Second, the church would make this selection together, bringing about unity among the brethren.
 - c. Third, the church would have a more personal stake in the relief effort.
 - 1) This would make the work alive to the members of the church. These brethren could come back and let the church know exactly what was happening in Jerusalem.
 - 2) That's why missionaries often want people to come over & see what's taking place—it makes the effort more real to the brethren at home. That makes it hard to cut off funds when people feel a personal connection to what's taking place in the mission effort.
- C. What should we learn?
 - 1. The money in a congregation needs to be clear, transparent.
 - a. That doesn't mean that the elders have to give a line-item budget to the church so that we know where every single cent goes. Sometimes, the church takes care of private benevolent needs that don't need to be public.
 - b. However, we need to be able to trust that the elders are using the money appropriately.
 - 1) An elder cannot be "a lover of money" (1 Tm 3:3).
 - 2) Elders take care of the finances in the local church (Acts 11:30).
 - 2. Gratefully, we have elders here whom we can trust with our finances.
 - a. I've never worried a single time I've taken my check to the bank that the check wouldn't clear.
 - b. I've never been concerned that the elders might misuse the funds I contribute weekly, for we have A CLEAR CONTRIBUTION.
 - 3. One day, we're going to stand transparent before God.
 - a. "No creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account" (Heb 4:13).
 - b. Are you ready to stand naked & exposed before God?