

Series on First Corinthians

By Doug Hamilton

1 Corinthians 16:1-4 - "The Strong Investment: The Offering"

1 Corinthians 16:1 Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I directed the churches of Galatia, so do you also.

- Paul introduces us to the last of five primary corporate principles found in the collective worship among the Christians today. When the saints were came together (1 Cor. 11:17, 18, 20, 33, 34, 14:23, 26, etc.) on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:2), there were five primary tasks within corporate worship:
 - Communion (11:20)
 - Singing (14:15)
 - Prayer (14:15)
 - Edification (14:6, 26)
 - Collection (16:1-4)
- It is in this collection of funds, the offering, that we will focus on in this lesson. Paul already said that he was consistent in his teachings throughout the churches of Christ, for what he taught in one church was the same for all the churches of Christ (1 Cor 4:17 *...just as I teach everywhere in every church.*) The primary lessons he taught in Corinth, he also taught in Galatia, Philippi, Antioch, Ephesus and anywhere else that the Lord took him.

What was this collection?

The saints in Jerusalem were suffering from the results of famine.

- Acts 11:27-30 Now at this time some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch.²⁸ One of them named Agabus stood up and *began* to indicate by the Spirit that there would certainly be a great famine all over the world. And this took place in the *reign* of Claudius.²⁹ And in the proportion that any of the disciples had means, each of them determined to send *a contribution* for the relief of the brethren living in Judea.³⁰ And this they did, sending it in charge of Barnabas and Saul to the elders.
- A prophet named Agabus predicted in 44 AD that a series of famines would occur throughout the world. A "Great Famine" is one that occurs over years. These famines historically materialized in the reign of Claudius Caesar in 46 AD and continued on for nearly seven years.
 - The fifth century historian Orosius mentions this famine in Syria which occurred in 46 and 47 A.D. "A.D. 46: In this year, Claudius, the second Roman emperor to invade Britain, put much of the island under his control and added the Orkneys to Rome's kingdom. This took place in the fourth year of his rule. In this same year, a great famine in Syria took place which Luke mentions in his book, "The Acts of the Apostles." Due to his incompetence, the Emperor Claudius Nero almost lost control of the British isle.
 - Suetonius wrote in the 'Life of Claudius' chapter 18: "There was a scarcity of food, which was the result of bad harvests that occurred during a span of several years."
 - Jewish Historian Josephus wrote in Antiquities 20 chapter 1.3-2.5: "Around this time lived queen Helena of Adiabene, along with her son Izates. They both began to follow the Jewish way, turning away from their past lifestyle . . . Her arrival

Series on First Corinthians

By Doug Hamilton

was of great help to the masses in Jerusalem; for there was a famine in the land that overtook them, and many people died of starvation. When it became necessary to obtain food abroad, queen Helena sent some of her attendants, with money, to the city of Alexandria to purchase as much grain as possible. She also sent others to the island of Cyprus to bring back dried figs. This whole process happened very quickly, and as soon as they had returned, they handed the provisions out to those who were in dire need of them. Because of this, she left behind a legacy and was held in great respect by the people and the nation at large. And when her son Izates became aware of this famine, he sent a large gift to the leaders in Jerusalem.”

- This was one of the greatest famines the world had ever known and people, particularly in the Middle-east were suffering greatly. In particular a new group of persecuted people called Christians.
 - Hebrews 10:32-34 But remember the former days, when, after being enlightened, you endured a great conflict of sufferings,³³ partly by being made a public spectacle through reproaches and tribulations, and partly by becoming sharers with those who were so treated.³⁴ For you showed sympathy to the prisoners and accepted joyfully the seizure of your property, knowing that you have for yourselves a better possession and a lasting one.
- Because of the prediction of famine by God through this man named Agabus, the apostles agreed to emphasize the Jewish practice of taking up a collection in assemblies when they met together on the first day of the week.
 - A note of interest: "Under the Roman empire Jewish communities sent money to Jerusalem. Philo in his *Embassy to Gaius* records a letter of the proconsul Gaius Norbanus Flaccus to the magistrates at Ephesus: 'Caesar has written to me saying that it is a special ancestral custom of the Jews, wherever they live, to meet and contribute money which they send to Jerusalem. He does not wish them to be prevented from doing this.'" -Arnold, C. E. (2002). *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary Volume 3: Romans to Philemon*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.
- It appears that the custom of the Jews sending money to Jerusalem was readily accepted among the Christian churches. By the authority of God, the apostles literally infused giving combined assembled Christian worshippers and a collection together.
- When the Jerusalem conference occurred in 47 AD is when Paul referenced in *Galatians 2:10* *They only asked us to remember the poor—the very thing I also was eager to do.* Years later during the writing of the First Letter to the Corinthians in 55 AD, long after the famine, Paul is still encouraging the churches to have a collection on the first day of the week to use in the lives of Christians.

What was the problem?

- The Corinthians were rather tight-fisted and controlling when it came to this area of their life. They came primarily from a gentile background, not a Jewish. In their pagan religion giving was not really a key item.
 - 2 Cor. 11:8-9 I robbed other churches by taking wages *from them* to serve you;⁹ and when I was present with you and was in need, I was not a burden to anyone;

Series on First Corinthians

By Doug Hamilton

for when the brethren came from Macedonia they fully supplied my need, and in everything I kept myself from being a burden to you, and will continue to do so.

- It wasn't that Paul did not have a right to be funded for the work of evangelism, for he is the same apostle that said in *1 Timothy 5:18* *For the Scripture says, "YOU SHALL NOT MUZZLE THE OX WHILE HE IS THRESHING,"* and *"The laborer is worthy of his wages."* It was more because he did not want them accusing him of preaching for money and not for the gospel's sake.
 - 1 Cor. 9:18 What then is my reward? That, when I preach the gospel, I may offer the gospel without charge, so as not to make full use of my right in the gospel.
 - 1 Cor. 9:23 I do all things for the sake of the gospel, so that I may become a fellow partaker of it.
- When he first planted a church in Corinth, he worked with his hands making tents with Priscilla and Aquila (Acts 18:3). He did not want the Corinthians paying him like one of the many fancy orators traveling the pagan circuit in those days. *Acts 18:5* *But when Silas and Timothy came down from Macedonia, Paul began devoting himself completely to the word, solemnly testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ.* When the mission funds from Macedonia came in, Paul was able to go fulltime into the work and the church massively grew in number.
- **Important Note:** When the Jews planted synagogues throughout the Empire, it was done in the following way.
 - When few Jewish families were in a community, they would meet on the Sabbath in a calm setting like a riverside or a park (*Acts 16:13* "...where we were supposing that there would be a place of prayer). If one was permanent enough and had a house large enough, they would meet there.
 - When ten families or more were assembling on a regular basis, each family would contribute 10% of the income toward bringing in a fulltime Rabbi or teacher to head the efforts of conversion and ministering. This would literally make the Rabbis pay the average of the entire assembly.
 - As the group grew larger, they would focus the extra funds on building a permanent synagogue structure to meet in. This would accommodate the future growth of the community through their outreach. Hopefully over the years they would continue successful proselytizing.
- Because the heavily gentile-ratio Corinthians did not the traditional teaching of giving from their pagan worship background, they would have to be taught in another way. If they would not be motivated to give to the local work, then Paul would press them to assist the universal work of supporting suffering Christians in Jerusalem, even though the famines had long subsided.

Paul encouraged the saints of Corinth through the giving of others.

- 1 Cor. 8:1-5 Now, brethren, we *wish to* make known to you the grace of God which has been given in the churches of Macedonia,² that in a great ordeal of affliction their abundance of joy and their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality.³ For I testify that according to their ability, and beyond their ability, *they gave* of their own accord,⁴ begging us with much urging for the favor of participation in the support of the saints,⁵ and *this*, not as we had expected, but they first gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God.

Series on First Corinthians

By Doug Hamilton

Paul explained that by supporting the poor saints of Jerusalem that the Corinthian need for full acceptance by the Jewish Christians would be fulfilled.

- 2 Corinthians 8:13 For *this* is not for the ease of others *and* for your affliction, but by way of equality—¹⁴ at this present time your abundance *being a supply* for their need, so that their abundance also may become *a supply* for your need, that there may be equality; ¹⁵ as it is written, “HE WHO *gathered* MUCH DID NOT HAVE TOO MUCH, AND HE WHO *gathered* LITTLE HAD NO LACK.”
- 2 Cor. 9:12 For the ministry of this service is not only fully supplying the needs of the saints, but is also overflowing through many thanksgivings to God.
- When the Jewish Christians of Jerusalem receive the funds from these gentiles of Corinth, they will see that they truly worship the same God and have the same Savior Jesus Christ.

1 Corinthians 16:2 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 was to be done on the first day of EVERY WEEK. Paul would be there in a few months and they needed to be prepared in advance. They were an autonomous congregation collectively pooling their funds for a common work. God caused them to prosper and they will spiritually prosper when they cause others to do the same.

How did they do in this effort?

- They might not have had a collection to support Paul in his evangelism, but they did do a great job when it came to this. Paul wrote from Corinth to the Roman church in *Romans 15: 26 For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem.* They did well.
- They likely even helped pay for Paul's travel back to Jerusalem. *2 Cor. 1:16 "...and by you to be helped on my journey to Judea."* They were the church that struggled in this area of their worship, but they were well on the way to overcoming this.

1 Corinthians 16:3-4 When I arrive, whomever you may approve, I will send them with letters to carry your gift to Jerusalem; ⁴ and if it is fitting for me to go also, they will go with me.

- Just to make sure that the Corinthians know that everything is on the level, Paul offers to have some hand selected brothers from the congregation to accompany the offering back to Jerusalem.
 - Acts 20:4 And he was accompanied by Sopater of Berea, *the son* of Pyrrhus, and by Aristarchus and Secundus of the Thessalonians, and Gaius of Derbe, and Timothy, and Tychicus and Trophimus of Asia.
- Apparently the Corinthians trusted in Paul and the present mission team to make the trip without representation, for they had seen the real beauty in giving to the needy. Halfway back on the trip to Jerusalem, Paul would tell the elders of Ephesus from the shores of Miletus “*In everything I showed you that by working hard in this manner you must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, ‘It is more*

Series on First Corinthians

By Doug Hamilton

blessed to give than to receive. ' "(Acts 20:35). Yes it is and the Corinthians learned this lesson well.

What lessons do we learn from this?

1. The collection we have in worship is just as important as the as the singing, praying, communion and teaching.
2. The collection we have in worship is an investment in the kingdom with which we are.
3. The collection we have in worship must always be in competent hands.