

The Collection

The Collection. One of the most basic Christian privileges is giving. We have a giving God (John 3:16), and we ought to reflect His character. Throughout the New Testament we have instructions and patterns set forward for the assembly to have collections where funds can be gathered and used in the service of the Lord. Following on 1 Cor. 16:1-4, the most extensive inspired treatment of the issue of Christian generosity is found in 2 Corinthians 8 - 9. It fits in with the broader subject of 2 Corinthians because one of the ways Christian ministry is supported is through Christian giving. What was being given? We can give our time, energy, and love to the Lord, but *money* is what is spoken of in connection with the collection. Why is money to be collected? Money is a useful way to transfer substance. Yet money is something we naturally cling to very tightly. Christian giving is really a test for us, whether we love others, or whether we love ourselves; whether we consider our possessions to be our own, or the Lord's. Money is not evil; but the *love* of money is the root of all evil (1 Tim. 6:10). Hebrews 13:16 shows us that God is "*well pleased*" with the sacrifice of our substance. In his epistles, Paul clearly separates giving to the ministering for personal needs and giving to the poor. These are the primary uses of the collection in scripture.

- *Supporting the one that ministers* (1 Cor. 9). Wherever he traveled, Paul worked with his own hands as a tent maker for his personal needs (Acts 20:33-34). On occasion, Paul would receive support from individuals and assemblies, such as the Philippians. When Paul was imprisoned he did accept money from the Philippians, who "*sent once and again unto my necessity*" (Phil. 4:17). Paul had never taken money from the Corinthians (2 Cor. 12:13-14), who were relatively wealthy. He speaks of "*robbing other churches*" (2 Cor. 11:8-9). In 1 Cor. 9 we have a little light on why Paul chose not to receive financial support from the Corinthians: because it left him free to preach and teach whatever the Lord asked him, without any possibility of corruption. There was a worldly spirit among the Corinthians, and Paul felt it might compromise his ministry to take what was rightfully his from the Corinthians. Paul also wouldn't receive from the Thessalonians because there was a problem with laziness there, and he wanted to set a good example (1 Thess. 2:9; 2 Thess. 3:6-12). Nevertheless, scripture is clear that it is right and proper for believers to financially support those that serve them (1 Cor. 9:9; 1 Tim. 5:18; Gal. 6:6).
- *Sending aid to the poor* (1 Cor. 16; 2 Cor. 8-9). Giving to the poor is an important

part of Christianity. As individuals, we are to be very forward in giving to the poor of this world, feeding the hungry, etc. as we have in our Lord's own ministry, and displayed in His own habits (Matt. 6:3; Matt. 19:21; Matt. 26:11; Luke 12:33; John 13:29). See also Acts 10:2 and 1 Cor. 13:3. But concerning the collection, its primary use is for the saints, hence it is called "*the collection for the saints*" (1 Cor. 6:1). The assembly ought to take care of the poor within the Christian company first. This could take place at a local level, and also at a global level. We have instructions for the assembly to give to the widows indeed (1 Tim. 5) and even perhaps the fatherless (James 1:27). But Paul, on his missionary journeys, was seeking to stir up the wealthy Gentile believers to send a collection to the poor saints in Jerusalem. It was fitting that the apostle to the uncircumcision be the one to round-up these funds. Paul and Barnabas had delivered an earlier collection to relieve the needs of the brethren there in Jerusalem (Acts 11:27-30), and he had arranged with Peter to do so again before leaving on his second journey (Gal. 2:10). Then, upon returning from his third journey, Paul delivered it (Acts 24:17; Rom. 15:25-26). The brethren in Judea were in a state of continual poverty since the very earliest days of the Church, as a result of three things: first, they had *sold their possessions* in unselfish love to have all things common (Acts 4:32); second, there arose *a great famine* in the days of Claudius Caesar (Acts 11:27-30); and third, they suffered *the spoiling of their goods* by those who opposed and persecuted them (Heb. 10:34). The collection was gathered by the assemblies in Macedonia or northern Greece, and Achaia or southern Greece (Acts 24:17; Rom. 15:25-26). The Macedonians were relatively poor, and yet had given more readily (2 Cor. 8:2). The Corinthians were quite wealthy, but having started to pull the funds together, and hearing that Paul's visit was delayed for one year, had not finished the collection. Paul wrote to them encouraging them to finish, just as they had intended. Rom. 15:25 shows us that they did eventually finish the collection, and Paul carried it with him to Jerusalem!

The two passages, 1 Cor. 16 and 2 Cor. 8-9, give us a composite sketch of how the collection should be gathered, handled, and used for the Lord.