

A WORD ABOUT GIVING.



THE Lordship of Christ was the first truth preached after the Church was formed on the day of Pentecost. Under His government was the kingdom, and the Church set up at the beginning—at least they were the circles that owned Him, that is, Jesus, made Lord and Christ. (See Acts ii.) Those that submitted were baptized, and continued steadfastly in the apostle's doctrine, in the fellowship and breaking of bread, and in prayers. All were together, and had all things in common. No one counted what he had as his own, it all belonged to the Lord. This is not communism, but the Lord's authority owned. He was the One owned as having bought them with His blood, and as the One to whom everything belonged. The offering was purely voluntary, as we see from Acts v. 4. No other Christian or man had a claim over them, they owned the Lord in it, and offered it to Him.

This system of giving did not continue, as we see in the after history of the Church, and from the rule of 1 Cor. xvi. 1; see also 1 Tim. vi. 17, 18, but the principle ever remains, that all that the Christian possesses is the Lord's, and he owes it to Him.

The fact of the rule of 1 Cor. xvi. 1 being joined to the first day of the week, which the apostle John calls, in Rev. i., the Lord's day, connects that rule with the Lord's Name and the Lord's authority.

The first day of the week is the Lord's day; on the first day of the week the apostle Paul enjoined each individual in the Gentile assemblies to lay by him in store, as the Lord had prospered him.

Now it is quite true that this order was in connection with a special collection for the poor saints at Jerusalem, whose need Paul had promised to think of, when the great conference was held at Jerusalem, in connection with the Gentiles being put under the law of Moses or not. See Gal. ii. 10. But in reference to the need of poor saints, and of the servants of God, I would ask, Is not the need continual, and what other rule have we in the Word for the systematic supply of that need, excepting in this chapter? It is not to be thought that this rule, and manner of giving, in reference to which two whole chapters are devoted—chapters viii. and ix. of the 2nd Corinthians—could be only confined to some such extraordinary need of saints in a special place at some special time.

But it seems to me that 1 Cor. xvi. 1, 2 is very little understood amongst the saints. The weekly putting in of a mite into a box is often supposed to fulfil it, and the real profit of the passage is lost to the consciences of the saints.

Now it seems to me to be God's great plan, as I have mentioned before, for the systematic supply of His poor saints. It was the plan whereby the great Gentile collection for the poor saints at Jerusalem was made amongst the Gentile assemblies (comp. 2 Cor. viii., ix.). The plan was, upon every first day of the week "let every one lay by him at home, as God hath prospered him, that there might be no collections when the apostle came."

Now in connection with the assembly, there seem to me to be three special spheres of need to be met:—

1st. The local need in each place.

2nd. An extraordinary need in another place.

3rd. The need of the servants of the Lord.

The local need of each place was met, in the early church, by the saints' gifts being entrusted to special men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost, and of wisdom, who by the choice of the saints, and the setting apart by the apostles, were set over this business. (See Acts vi.) The need of a special character being attached to these men was afterwards insisted on by the apostle Paul to Timothy (see 1 Tim. iii.), and of their being married men. Now, though we have no apostles to set such men apart to-day by the laying on of hands, and the church is all in ruin, yet cannot we count on Him who has the key of David, with the power of government on His shoulder, to bring in or raise up amongst the saints men with the needed characteristics, *which is the great thing now*, so that the saints should confidently entrust their money to them for the local need in each place. The box on the Lord's table is a fit exhibition of the saints thus devoting part of their profits for the supply of the local need in a place.

The extraordinary need of saints, was met by the plan of 1 Corinthians xvi. 1. And mark, dear reader: the plan here was not by putting money in a box on the Lord's table every first day of the week; but by each saint laying by him in store, as he was prospered. Then at a special time, after weeks or months of laying by, all was brought together by Titus or others who went round the assemblies for this end, so that quite a considerable sum was thus collected in each assembly for the need of the poor saints at Jerusalem. (Comp. 1 Cor. xvi. 3-4, with 2 Cor. viii. 1-6, 16-24.) Now if saints were to put into practice systematically this plan, what an

amount would be always ready at any special moment, for the supply of some special need. It might be locally or in another place. We find in connection with this, Paul, and other servants of God taking an intermediate place, for the overseeing of such collections being brought together, which I suppose should be carried out in principle in the present day by those on whom the Holy Ghost lays this special service and burden.

The need of the servants of God seems to have been met by the love of the different assemblies amongst whom they laboured. Paul and his helpers might have claimed the support of the saints, but they did not, they relied on their love. (1 Cor. ix. 14, 15; 2 Cor. xi. 7-9.)

As to power they could claim it, even though the servant should be a married man, as other brethren and the apostles did, and Cephas. Who went a warfare on his own charges? Who planted a vineyard and did not eat the fruit thereof? Who fed a flock and did not drink of the milk of the flock? So the Lord had ordained, as also the law shewed in various ways, that they that preached the gospel should live of the gospel. Saints should remember this, and think of the labourers, but Paul and his helpers did not use this power to claim the money of the saints. He counted on their love. He refused the gifts of the Corinthians because they begrudged it; he accepted that of the Philippians, for it was the real service of love. Once and again, after the apostle had left Philippi, the Philippians had ministered to his necessity, even before he left Macedonia. Now they had sent to him through Epaphroditus a fresh proof of their love. Thus the Spirit that prompted the gift provided a willing servant to convey it to the Lord's suffering servant in Rome just at the right

time. Here there was no intermediate brother as the channel, except to convey it. It was conveyed direct from the assembly to the servant through Epaphroditus. And ought not the assemblies of to-day thus to feel their privilege of helping the servants of the Lord; and that directly, and not through intermediate channels? Should not their paths in service be of such interest to the saints that they should follow them with their prayers, and also at the right time with their gifts! The assemblies are the best judges as to who edifies them, and thus would we often be saved from men running about without gift and causing more disorder among the saints than edification. On the plan of every saint laying by every first day of the week, there would be a ready supply for the need of the servants of the Lord as well as of the poor saints, whenever a collection was made for any of them, and thus there would be no lack.

Thus the local need of assemblies was met by men raised up of God, and having the necessary character for the work, as seen in Acts vi. and 1 Tim. iii. Saints entrusted their money to them. The extraordinary need in another place by saints laying by every first day of the week, as they had been prospered, then at the needed time it was brought together by men fitted of God to do so like Titus and others. The need of the servants of God was met by the assemblies amongst whom they ministered, ministering to their need in love. Epaphroditus from Philippi was the willing servant to convey these tokens of the saints' love to the suffering apostle.

But what is the great rule, which if carried out would cause that a ready supply for the saints and servants' need, would be always at hand, as the occasion needed? Is it not 1 Cor. xvi. 1, 2? Upon every first day of the week let every one lay by him

in store, be it more or less. May the Lord stir up His beloved saints to see the importance of this rule.

I would just add a little table to show how much might be done in this way for the help of the saints.

Supposing a saint were to lay by but a penny a week, he would have 4s.4d. laid by at the end of the year. I append a table :

A saint laying by—	£	s.	d.
1d. a week, would have to give away yearly	0	4	4
2d. " "	0	8	8
3d. " "	0	13	0
4d. " "	0	17	4
5d. " "	1	1	8
6d. " "	1	6	0
7d. " "	1	10	4
8d. " "	1	14	8
9d. " "	1	19	0
10d. " "	2	3	4
11d. " "	2	7	8
12d. " "	2	12	0
1s.6d. " "	3	18	0
2s. " "	5	4	0
2s.6d. " "	6	10	0
3s. " "	7	16	0
4s. " "	10	8	0
5s. " "	13	0	0
10s. " "	26	0	0
20s. " "	52	0	0

A gathering composed of 20 saints, laying by each on an average, 6d. a week, would lay by in the aggregate, 10s. a week, or £26 a year. In other words there would be £6 10s. a quarter ready to give away, for local or extraordinary needs. A gathering of 40 saints, laying by the same amount

would have £13 quarterly, and £52 a year to give for the local and extraordinary need of poor saints, or towards the help of the servants of God.

100 gatherings of an average of 40 saints each, on this principle would raise.....£5,200 yearly.
500 gatherings£26,000 yearly.

Let the box by all means remain on the table for the necessary expenses of the room, and for the local need of the poor saints, as well as to be used at the time of special collections made for poor saints or the servants of God. But let the saints understand that the 1 Cor. xvi. 1, does not refer to this, but to laying by at home every first day of the week, so that when the special need comes there is a supply always ready, either for poor saints or servants of God.

Lastly I would mention, that in 2 Cor. viii., ix., we have three blessed principles set before us as to giving. 1st, the blessed Christ as the great motive power and example of giving (chap. viii. 9); 2nd, the giving of the manna, as the exhibition as to the way it should be carried out (ver. 13-15). 3rd, the governmental blessings as the result of giving with a free heart. (chap. ix.)

The blessed Lord Jesus who was rich, for our sakes became poor, that we through His poverty might be rich. He emptied Himself of heaven's treasures of grace, to pay our ransom to God to set us free by His blood, and rising again from the dead, has associated us with Himself in all the positive blessings of the heavenly places. Consequent on repentance and faith in Him, we partake of all these blessings. We are truly made rich through His poverty.

2nd, the manna was God's gift to all. Some gathered more, some less, but it was divided by God's measuring instrument, and those that had

gathered more had the privilege of supplying those who had less, so that there might be equality as to practice. Is not this blessed instruction for rich Christians individually to help their poorer brethren, and for richer assemblies, as occasions might arise, to help poorer assemblies or brethren in other places, as the Gentile assemblies helped Jerusalem.

3rd, He that sowed sparingly should reap also sparingly, he that sowed bountifully should reap also bountifully. Let each man do according as he hath purposed in his heart, for God loveth a cheerful giver, and God is able to make all grace abound towards the saints, that they, having all-sufficiency in all things, might abound to every good work. If I prosper in business, I am privileged all the more to abound to every good work (2 Cor. ix. 6-15).

Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift !

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