

Fourth Corinthians Talk 1 November 2009

The Collection for the Lord's People 15 v 1-4

¹ Now about the collection for the Lord's people: Do what I told the Galatian churches to do. ² On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with your income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made. ³ Then, when I arrive, I will give letters of introduction to the men you approve and send them with your gift to Jerusalem. ⁴ If it seems advisable for me to go also, they will accompany me.

This morning I would like briefly to draw together 3 themes.

1. Today is ASD and we have already had in the collect prayer an injunction to follow the example of the saints.
2. Our first reading was 1 Cor 16, 4th in our Corinthian series, entitled Collection for the Lord's people, or in older versions, Collection for the Saints
3. Our worship this morning is essentially the Lord's Supper or Holy Communion.

The 'Collection for the Saints' was a crucial part of Paul's work but it is not often mentioned in church these days. In essence the first church in Palestine, especially Jerusalem, was suffering famine and Paul wanted the new churches such as those in Galatia (Turkey) and Corinth (Greece) to send aid. This is the basis for the plea in the reading to set aside cash, based on income, to go to this work. Paul does not give a formula for how this regular giving should relate to income.

In 2 Corinthians, the 2nd letter, Paul has a bit of a go at the church in Corinth. They'd done the opposite of a Magnus Magnusson on the situation, they'd started something but then didn't finish. Read ch 8. Paul presents the Macedonian church of Philippi as a role model. Even though very poor themselves they begged to be included in this relief work. In Greek they wanted the Charis of Koinonia. **Joy** of taking part, **Privilege** of being included, **Grace** of fellowship.

As the centuries since then have gone on the church has developed traditions in respect of giving, especially the **tithing** principle, giving a tenth of income or produce to God's work. A kind of compromise position between the sacrificial giving of Philippi and doing very little indeed, like the Corinthians were. Tithing is not a biblical command but a tradition drawn from OT practice. At one time a tenth of all parish income went to the vicar as his stipend. That practice ended many years ago.

So systematic giving = a biblical principle. Tradition says one tenth of income.

Shortly we move to our Eucharist. This will be the broad theme of the next 1 Corinthians talk but a sneak preview today shows a **remarkable** parallel.

Communion or Lord's Supper is very securely based on a clear biblical principle derived from the Last Supper. Paul gives a very similar account of it to the Corinthians as that found in 3 of the gospels. Christians throughout time have seen it as a vital part of worship. And yet the biblical account is brief. Jesus shares bread and wine with his disciples urging them to look back and then look forward. Paul talks about the need to prepare oneself properly, humbly, forgivingly.

But neither Jesus nor Paul mentions an altar, or altar linen, a priest, a patten, a pall, a pyx, or a purificator....All these things belong to Christian church traditions, traditions that some Christians (but by no means all) today find helpful. These traditions are drawn from the OT sacrificial system, much like tithing is drawn from OT models.

Practice today in communion is based upon a biblical principle, with layers of church tradition built on. Broadly we practise that today.

What about financial support for the church today and its wider mission in the parish and beyond, evangelism, community work, home and overseas aid? The biblical position is clear from our reading, regular giving is expected. Tradition points towards 10% as a general guide. A tithing approach.

A question for us all to consider. Is that a tradition we are equally happy to follow in order to support today's equivalent of 'collection for the saints'? Or do we sometimes 'cherry pick' those Biblical commands and those traditions we like best?

Toy service talk

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1. Paul wants us to be generous in helping others.
2. Example with balloons
3. Your generosity today is helping those who have little. Thankyou!
4. But more to be done
5. Mums and dads especially can note the regular giving Paul talks about.
6. Without it we cannot run the church nor can we, as a church, support the mission of God in this parish and elsewhere.
7. Some people think we get support from govt or national CE. We don't!
8. If you missed the plate coming in, its there again as you go out!

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