

CHAPTER 13

Did Paul Convert the Tithe to Money?

In Paul's time and in modern times, Christians chose what group or sect of believers they fellowshiped with and how much influence that ministry would have in their lives. In today's economic system, income is always confused with the Lord's tithe. When a person gives 10 percent of their income, always remember that the money is not being used in the same way as the actual herd and crop tithe of the Old Testament. Therefore, money is not holy to God because it is not the Lord's tithe but crops and cattle are. Paul never converted God's tithe to money and giving your church a tenth is not tithing to God.

When offering time rolls around on Sunday morning, verses from 2 Corinthians Chapters 8 and 9 and Malachi Chapter 3 are used out of context by pastors to argue for tithing. These Scriptures are strung together to make it appear that Paul taught believers to become faithful tithers. This

disingenuous intellectual process takes place through repetitive group-think, which involves not telling the whole truth about the authentic whole until money tithing becomes truth by convention. Also, to ensure regular tithing is not abandoned, some pastors pronounce a curse on people to produce fear as a way to bolster the argument that 10 percent belongs to God.

Even though 2 Corinthians 8 and 9 do not support tithing, people have a way of connecting Paul's giving references to tithing by cobbling together verses from the Old and New Testament to bolster the position that Christians need to tithe money. None of the Apostle's letters give any real methods of continuous weekly giving to support a building called church.

The problem with modern day churches is that the Epistles never instruct believers how to support buildings that a pastor and his representatives sign off on to obtain a mortgage with a lending institution. Most Bible teachers create extra-biblical instructions along with taking Scripture out of context to amass financial support. The context of 2 Corinthians 8 and 9 deals with Paul's giving appeal to help needy saints in Jerusalem who experienced a famine. How do we know this? The event Paul talks about in 2 Corinthians 8 and 9 refers to events in Acts 11:27-30, "*During this time some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. One of them, named Agabus, stood up and through the Spirit predicted that a severe famine would spread over the entire Roman world. (This happened during the reign of Claudius.) The disciples, as each one was able, decided to provide help for the brothers and sisters living in Judea. This they did, sending their gift to the elders by Barnabas and Saul*" (NIV). If you read this verse in the NKJV, it is clear that Paul did not command them to help but they gave voluntarily because Acts 11:29 says, "*Then the disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judaea*" (NKJV).

The important factor in Acts is the famine situation and the causes that put fellow believers in a tight spot that required help from Corinth. How could anyone interpret 2 Corinthians 8 and 9 to mean that Paul addressed tithing? In fact, the context is about an unidentified gift. Is the text referencing to money or food that Paul collected for the people who were suffering and who needed help? Be mindful that Paul uses specific words in his letters such as ministration, collections, and gift to describe benevolent giving, not tithing. When Agabus spoke of a famine in the world in Acts 11, he did not mean the entire earth. The word world in the text means the famine took place in certain parts of the Roman Empire. The Hebrew word for *world* is “*oikoumene*” (Strong’s #3625). If the entire world experienced a famine, the people in Antioch would have also been starving. The overall message Paul puts forth in 2 Corinthians 8:1-5 is that he encouraged the Corinthians to follow through on their promise to help believers in need. The chapter’s context does not establish a pattern for tithing or weekly giving. Paul starts chapter 8 with an example to encourage the Corinthians. He shows them how the Macedonian believers asked if they could partake in helping other needy believers even though they were poor themselves. Notice that Paul never commanded them to do this, but made it clear to the Corinthians that the Macedonians gave of their free will because they committed themselves to the Lord first. They gave not based on Paul’s command for a tithe, but by the will of God. Read 2 Corinthians 8:6-8, and make sure you are clear about Paul’s message. He exhorted them to give and never used guilt methods or glowing financial overflow testimonies or promises to bait them into action.

The subject of 2 Corinthians 8:1-5 is interesting because the language ought to turn on the inquiring mind. The text says:

Moreover, brethren, we make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia: that in a great trial of affliction the

*abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality. For I bear witness that according to their ability, yes, and beyond their ability, they were freely willing, imploring us with much urgency that we would receive the **gift** and the fellowship of the ministering to the saints (NKJV).*

There is a lot a person can gain from these verses, however, the important question is: What did these poor Macedonian believers give? Paul identifies what they offered as a GIFT, but says nothing about what items made up the GIFT. To determine what the gift was, we have to find out what *gift* means in Greek. “The English word *gift* is translated from the Greek word “*charis*.” “*Charis*” means charm, beauty, loveliness, favor, and preciousness: it does not mean grace as unmerited favor, kindness, or mercy. The actual word *grace* in the Greek is “*eleos*” and in Hebrew is “*chesed*”; it means unmerited favor, grace, kindness, pity and mercy.”⁸² So, the GIFT Paul speaks of in verse 4 might read like this, “That we should receive charm, beauty, favor, preciousness, underserved favor, mercy, kindness and the fellowship of the ministering in service to the saints.” What the Macedonians ministered in service to the needy saints in the age of “*charis*” (grace) is not called a tithe but giving grace. The payment of the mandatory tithe belongs to a different age. In this age of God’s underserved favor, charm, beauty, preciousness, mercy, and kindness through the Messiah, there is no longer tithing but grace giving. So even if the gift the Macedonians gave was money (which probably wasn’t much) or something else is immaterial because it seems the deep poverty they experienced would lead me to believe they had little to give. However, the most important point from verse 3 is *that they were freely willing* to give. Now if you check this word out in the Greek, it is “*authairetos*.” Vine’s dictionary says, *authairetos* is from *autos*, self and *haireomai*. It means to choose, self-chosen, voluntary, of ones own accord as in 2 Corinthians 8:3 and 17 in the churches of Macedonia when referencing their gift for the poor saints and

Titus's willingness to travel ahead and exhort the church in Corinth concerning this [giving] matter."⁸³ Paul used an example of the Macedonian poor giving to the poor to spur on the Corinthians to finish the work they started. The Macedonians gave a voluntary gift and Paul never forced them to do it.

In 2 Corinthians 9:7, Paul sets up a prescription for giving that is applicable for present day churches. The Word is clear on how one must give; Paul says, "*Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give, not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loves a cheerful giver*" (KJV). The NIV version renders the verse this way; "*Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.*" There is no way Paul taught tithing from this verse. If the context of verse 9 establishes a prescribed mandatory 10 percent, it would negate Paul's teaching that one can determine or purpose an amount in one's heart. The believers Paul addressed were not all Jewish, so why did he not discuss tithing with non-Hebraic believers, as this would have been a great opportunity to do so? Given the audience were not all Jewish, wouldn't one expect Paul to explain the differences between freewill offerings and mandatory tithing if he intended the practice to continue among New Covenant congregations? Even though tithing existed in the first century in some form among different nations, the tithe in the law was different; something that Paul would have clarified to the Gentiles as a requirement. However, Paul gave no teaching, which suggests that non-Hebrew people in the New Covenant had no tithe obligation. To argue tithing from the Corinthian perspective is a precarious position.⁸⁴

The context of 2 Corinthians 9:7 does not address weekly giving as practiced by most churches today. When Paul suggested giving from the heart, he was not thinking that people ought to offer a certain percentage. Paul's addressed the giving promise the Corinthians committed to do. He wanted them to reaffirm what they purposed in their heart to give.

“The words *he purposes* is translated from the Greek word ‘*proaireo*’ which means, to choose before, or to resolve before, that is, in one’s heart.”⁸⁵

Guess what people? You can choose how much to give and never forget that “each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver” (2 Corinthians 9:7).

The Greek verb ‘*proaireomai*’ translated as ‘*decided*,’ means ‘to choose for oneself, to determine, to make up one’s mind.’ It shows a deliberate resolve, deciding on the end and on the means of attainment. It is not the outcome of a spent emotion, or a promise half-regretted, but formed with a clear well-defined perception of all attendant circumstances, and neither ‘reluctantly,’ as regards amount, nor with reluctance, as giving under pressure. His concern is for ‘a consciously accepted obligation that is nevertheless free and not grounded in command or law. It is an act of faith in God who is able to supply our needs and enable us to be generous. It should be subject to financial accountability and integrity, and an expression of the unity of the fellowship of all believers. It is above all a response to God’s ‘in-describable gift’ of Christ.”⁸⁶

In fact, when anyone commands you to pay 10 percent because it’s a divine non-negotiable principle using Scripture out of context, it is an assault on Paul’s giving instructions in 2 Corinthians 9:7. When this happens, giving is reduced to no longer being willing giving from the heart; rather, giving becomes an exercise in necessity, which does not allow believers to make their own giving choices.

When you tell another tithing believer about 2 Corinthians 9:7, be careful because they will cut a scriptural path to Hebrews Chapter 7 as if it implies to money tithing to throw you off Paul’s command in Corinthians.

However, do not become flustered, as saying Hebrews teaches tithing contradicts Paul's instructions. We know Paul would never contradict himself. Using Hebrews to establish a tithe mandate is false because Paul's statements in 2 Corinthians are clear and direct on giving. Bible interpretation involves the practice of allowing clear statements in Scripture to interpret any unclear statements or passages in the text through context. What you must emphasize to die-hard tithing proponents is that they cannot artificially extract an unstated or unsubstantiated tithing rule out of Hebrews 7 and place it above the primary context of the chapter because doing so is an argument from the traditions of men. The primary context of Hebrews is not about tithing; it is about the priesthood of Christ being superior to the Levitical priesthood.

There are other points that must be examined in 2 Corinthians 9:7. Paul taught hilarious giving and stated what impacts that type of giving. The actual Greek word for *cheerful giving* is "*hilaros*" (Strong's #2431). It is where we get the word hilarious. Demanding a tithe from congregants is necessity giving and it is not as a man purposes in his heart. Saying a tithe is required of everyone based on what the preacher purposes in his heart forces congregants into grudging giving. Suggesting that giving under grace starts at 10 percent shackles love and turns giving into a tax offering not motivated by a cheerful heart but by law. Willing or cheerful giving can never happen when you take away choice from the heart. To avoid violating Paul's giving instructions, givers must always give from unrestricted favor and love, as their heart purposes without outside influences or pressure. Paul argues that any gift or offering a person gives must meet the requirements of 2 Corinthians 8:12, "*For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what one does not have*" (NIV). Paul is clear: God will not accept a gift or offering if it is given unwillingly, or out of necessity, or if it is beyond the ability of the giver. Giving until it hurts disqualifies the gift as acceptable to God and will

return nothing to the giver. Having a willingness to give matters, not the amount one gives. In Paul's mind as a Hebrew, he understood the Hebrew concept for *charity*, which is "tzedakah." Paul knew that cheerful, willing giving could only happen when it is practiced without necessity or under compulsion. In Corinthians, Paul looks for (legitimate) situations where one could give what is needed to meet a legitimate need, which were the poor saints.

Too often we view giving as money, but we can give in other ways, too. When dealing with money, some caution that one should not endanger the family budget by thoughtless giving. So if you need financial help after you give in your place of worship, you are a thoughtless giver. If 2 Corinthians 8:12 is the guideline for giving and focuses giving on "*not according to what one does not have*," then that is the giving standard. From the context, Paul was dealing with the Corinthian's personal economy, which involved food, shelter, and other necessities. The question is how do you give based on what you do not have? You don't. You give based on what you have to give. According to 1 Corinthians 16:2, the guidance was to lay aside something each week by saving it until it was time to deliver the gift. The context did not specify an amount from the weekly income so there is no tithe connection. Based on how people lived then in practical terms, laying aside something from what one has can only come from what is left after necessary obligations are subtracted. Paul instructed the Corinthians to give out of what they had left over after taking care of other necessary obligations.

Paul makes a similar argument about giving and family responsibilities in 1 Timothy 5:8 which says, "*If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an **unbeliever***" (NIV84). This verse exposes the lie that the tithe is what God receives first. According to Paul, your first obligation is to provide for the needs of your family. Your house comes first, God's house follows and if this order is not upheld, Paul deems the giver an unbeliever.

The KJV uses the word infidel. *Infidel* in Greek is Strong's #571, which is "*apistos*." Being called an infidel, which is an unbeliever is bad; however, when Paul says you are worse than an infidel and that is an even stronger indictment against irresponsible giving. When you don't pay your mortgage or take care of your family who depend on you, but pay your tithes, Paul says you are untrustworthy because unbelievers would not act that way. Subsequently, you can share what you have left with the church and the world. If you think Paul is kidding, read 1 Timothy 5:8 in the CEV version, which says, "*People who don't take care of their relatives and especially their own families, have given up their faith. They are worse than someone who doesn't have faith in the Lord. Wow!*" People who pay tithes or do anything before they buy food or take care of basic family needs have no faith.

Well then. How important is giving? It is so important that everything you give must be driven from your heart and the result is a wonderful feeling. The fact that Paul warned against grudging or necessity giving should cause all of us to pay attention to how we give and for what purpose. How does one give grudgingly? The Greek word *grudgingly* is "*lupe/lype*" (Strong's #3077). It means giving is done out of a cause that forces people's hands. This results in grief and sorrow. Doesn't the command to cough up 10 percent or suffer a curse from God cause grief and sorrow when the giver can't afford to pay 10 percent but does so out of fear? That is a perfect example of grudging giving. When you can't give according to how you purpose in your heart, but are mandated by a percentage, then giving becomes grief stricken and sorrowful. Your heart is ripped from the giving process and cheerful giving becomes yoke giving. Asking people to pay 10 percent with threats of a curse is not true giving. It's like an IRS law. We don't like paying the IRS, but they don't care about our feelings because the law says we have to pay up or suffer the consequences. Tithing is based on the law and it can't be ripped from its context then redefined as grace tithing required under the New Covenant without it becoming a

grudging practice. Converting the food tithe to money and commanding 10 percent of income does not allow the heart to decide how much to give and that produces feelings of grief and sorrow. God can't respond to this giving method. The only person who benefits the most from tithe money is the one on the receiving end. In the Old Testament, the tither (farmers and herders) had the choice to redeem the crop tithe as Leviticus 27:30-33 point out. Giving should not bring harm or sorrow and God does not ask us to test him or tempt him with unreasonableness in giving. Any outside constraint to give 10 percent is not compatible with cheerful giving which comes from the heart. If tithing was an obligation in the first century Ekklesia, Paul wouldn't have told the Corinthians to determine in their heart what to give. If you follow Paul's instructions, then you can't accept someone's personal giving command about the amount you give and to whom and where you give. Even if you are a part of a local congregation, it makes sense to give at that place of worship, but even then, you can give to other charitable entities.

The next point Paul argued against in 2 Corinthians 9:7 is giving out of necessity. Why should people avoid necessity giving? When Paul spoke of *necessity giving*, the Greek word is "*anagke*" (Strong's #318). It is the idea that something constricts, distresses, binds hard, or by compelling force. When Paul advised the Corinthians against necessity giving, he meant that giving under the pressure of necessity happens if it is imposed either by external condition of things, or by law of duty regarding one's advantage, custom or argument. Paul forbade giving under "an obligation of a compelling nature, a complete obligation, or necessary obligation."⁸⁷ Giving this way involves inward pressure and causes self-imposed guilt giving through customs or arguments. To impose tithing on people as a requirement makes it a law and that puts giving in a necessity category. The point is, tithing is under the law and it is a perfect example of necessity ("*anagke*") giving. If you feel guilty about giving less than 10 percent, that is

constriction. Never think you are locked into the 10 percent principle, and if you do, you'll feel bound hard and become afraid not to tithe because of a curse. That will cause distressful feelings, which produces intense pressure to give under a compelling force. All of this falls under necessity giving, which Paul forbids. He appealed to voluntary giving from a doctrinal standpoint and always endorsed freewill giving based on what he knew from the first five books of the Bible. When Paul suggested giving as one purposes from their heart, he was not suggesting or implying the tenth or a tithe in the context. When necessity, grudging, or compulsion tithing is the method of financial support used by tithe proponents, it's like being held up at gunpoint because willingness, choice, and cheerfulness are stripped from the individual believer's heart. Demanding that the Bible requires a tithe of money and that giving must start at 10 percent under grace shackles love and turns giving into a tax offering or membership dues. No one likes to feel as if their Church is sticking them up every Sunday morning with pressure packed guilt giving sermons. So why do the instructions in 2 Corinthians 9:7 get violated every Saturday and Sunday when Churches take an offering? When Paul addressed the Corinthians, he relied on his understanding of God's Law to instruct them how to give from a willing heart without a percentage. The Scriptures that Paul could have referenced when teaching the Corinthians about New Testament grace giving comes from the Old Testament. Paul believed that giving should be cheerful and absent of contamination from necessity and grudging. He established that theological giving perspective from these Scriptures he read and applied in New Covenant giving:

- A. "Speak to the children of Israel, that they bring Me an offering. From everyone who gives **it willingly with his heart** you shall take My offering" (Exodus 25:2 NKJV).

- B. “Take from among you an offering to the LORD. Whosoever **is of a willing heart**, let him bring it as an offering to the LORD: gold silver, and bronze...” (Exodus 35:5 NKJV).
- C. “The children of Israel brought a freewill offering to the LORD, all the men and women **whose hearts were willing** to bring *material* for all kinds of work which the LORD, by the hand of Moses, had commanded to be done” (Exodus 35:29 NJKV).
- D. “And they received from Moses all the offering which the children of Israel had brought for the work of the service of making the sanctuary. So they continued bringing to him **freewill offerings every morning**” (Exodus 36:6 NKJV).

One author writes:

The Corinthians giving was not by commandment [1 Corinthians 8:8], nor of necessity or grudging [2 Corinthians 9:7]. Under the law, a tenth was commanded and its payment was a necessity; under grace, God is not seeking the gift, but an expression of devotion from the giver. Under grace no [giving] law is imposed and no proportion to be given is stipulated, and, while it is true that God works in the yielded heart both to will and to do His good pleasure (Philippians 2:13), He finds pleasure only in that gift which is given cheerfully, or more literally, “hilariously” (2 Corinthians 9:7).⁸⁸

In Exodus 36:6-7, the text says, “*So Moses gave a commandment, and they caused it to be proclaimed throughout the camp, saying, Let neither man nor woman do any more work for the offering of the sanctuary. And the people were restrained from bringing, for the material they had was sufficient for all the work to be done—indeed too much*” (NKJV). What a novel idea that when there was enough for the work, Moses suspended freewill giving. Paul understood that the old covenant society operated under a theocracy

and it was established under Moses at Mount Sinai. The theocratic government was at first supported simply by freewill contributions. So Paul's appeal to freewill giving and support in his letters is exactly how New Covenant congregations supposed to operate today—and that is without the tithe being commuted to money.

In 2 Corinthians 9:7, Paul appeals to the Corinthians asking them to help the poor saints in Jerusalem. The Old Testament verses that Paul may have used for his foundational giving appeal could be Deuteronomy 15:7-15 and verse 10 specifically, which reads, *Give generously to them [your poor brethren], and do so without a grudging heart; [opposite of cheerful giving] then because of this the LORD your God will bless you in all your work and in everything you put your hand to* (NIV). As God instructed Israelites to help their poor brethren in Deuteronomy 15 without grief, Paul uses this same argument in Corinth to obtain help for those in Jerusalem without necessity and grudging giving. This is the same concept in 2 Corinthians Chapters 8 and 9. Necessity giving and grudgingly giving causes grief. That's why Paul did not want the Corinthians to give from a position where their giving would cause them harm or sorrow. Paul was after responsible, reasonable and realistic giving where they balanced their own needs with the needs of others. Giving in blind faith and expecting God to bail us out for doing what we think is good is tempting and testing God with unreasonableness, even if we think is it a good gesture⁸⁹ (Deuteronomy 6:16; Matthew 4:1; Luke; 4:12; Acts 15:10).

Returning to 2 Corinthians 8:3, 4 and 8, we can't overlook an important point Paul sets up as he encourages the Corinthian believers to complete their giving promise. His purpose was for them to give freely like the Macedonians did whom he said were willing to give after they gave themselves to the Lord first. Paul never mentions, or appeals to a tithe on income in chapter 8. In fact, the contribution he asks them to give has no relationship to obligatory tithing because he writes in verse 8, "I speak

not by commandment.” Paul wanted their generosity to come from sincere love for those in need and not by some arbitrary tithe command. Because Christ gave himself as a gift, it served as the Corinthians example to give in a sacrificial offering. When preachers try to intermix Malachi 3 with 2 Corinthians Chapters 8 and 9, you end up with two problematic paradigms. One, crops, herds and flocks are the tithe according to the law. Two, giving what you have decided in your heart is encouraged by Paul without a percentage. Let me be clear: there is no Bible verse or argument from silence in Scripture that proves the tithe is commanded from cold hard cash. Paul exhorts giving and does so without ever commanding anyone to tithe. Paul never said, “Let each one tithe as God commanded.” Pastors establish a false equivalency that says the New Testament Church building, as God’s house, is equal to the Old Testament temple; therefore, tithes are required. To insult the intelligence of the Scripture, they throw in the Old Testament Levites and priests and say pastors are equal to Levites to justify why all members of the Ekklesia must tithe. Not so! Preachers and Levites may perform similar religious functions, but that comparison ends right there. If someone asks you if preachers are the equivalent or the continuance of the Levitical priesthood, the answer is no for three reasons: 1) the Levitical priesthood was based on heredity and Levites only came from the tribe of Levi; 2) the Levites bore the sins of Israel based on Numbers 18:1 and Numbers 18:23. Pastors are not responsible for sins of believers because Jesus paid that penalty on the cross; 3) pastors are not Levites because Christ priesthood replaced the Levitical priesthood which makes all believers priests in Christ priesthood as stated in 1 Peter 2:9 and Rev 5:10.⁹⁰

I think this book presents convincing doctrinal evidence that no money tithe argument can be established because it is inconsistent with Scripture, context and history. Although the Bible clearly describes that tithing took place in many verses, it does not mean that we continue the

practice through commuting the tithe to money. The description of tithing food in the Old Testament does not equate to a money tithe prescription in the New Testament.

Other Bible verses that are often used to support that Paul taught tithing is 1 Corinthians 16:1-2. It reads, *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* (NIV). You must realize that collections, contributions, and offerings are not tithes in 1 Corinthians 16:1-3 and 5, 2 Corinthians 8:1-9:15, and Acts 11:27-30. This includes Romans 15:26-27, which says, *For Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the Lord's people in Jerusalem. They were pleased to do it, and indeed they owe it to them. For if the Gentiles have shared in the Jews' spiritual blessings, they owe it to the Jews to share with them their material blessings* (NIV). The context of Paul's giving references has nothing to do with tithing, but everything to do with giving to help poor, needy believers during a famine in Jerusalem. In this widespread fundraising effort, Paul travels to the Galatian and Macedonian congregations to raise an offering for believers affected by the famine (Acts 11:28). Another reason Paul requested help could be because of persecution as recorded in Acts 8:1, after Paul's conversion.

To the extent to which tithe arguments go, even 1 Corinthians 9:14 and 16:1-3 are wrenched out of context and used as proof text that Christians must pay tithes to support their churches. The thought used to buttress this point is that the tithing system was altered during Israel's shift from an agrarian and farming culture with all the feasts and festivals to the suburban lifestyle of the New Testament times. It is believed the income tithes from city dwellers replaced the land-based tithing system. That viewpoint is problematic because there are no Scriptures to hermeneutically prove such an outlandish argument. Paul's letters to the Corinthians do

not contain a single word about tithes. However what we do see in First Corinthians is an effort by Paul to get the Corinthians to help the poor saints in Judea get through some tough times.

It has been established that Israel was not a 100 percent agrarian culture and that money was a part of everyday use but never as a tithe. Paul's message regarding giving involved a systematic collection of gifts for the needy at a particular time in history. Paul reminded the Corinthians of their promise in 2 Corinthians 8:10. The message of 1 Corinthians 16:1-3 and 2 Corinthians 8:12 teaches that you are to give whatever God blesses you with only after you meet necessary obligations. If churches adopted this giving method, equitable sharing would result and no one economic group would be overly burdened or taxed to help the church. We know the Corinthians gave out of their abundance as Paul states in 2 Corinthians 8:14, "*At the present time your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need. The goal is equality*" (NIV). This love offering was not to the Lord but to poor saints who needed food and other necessities. As a Hebrew of Hebrews, Paul taught a concept that believers must take care of their less fortunate followers in the faith community by giving adequate charity according to their means. Here, the Gentile believers needed to help out their Jewish believers in the faith. How can anyone extrapolate tithing from any of Paul's writings on giving? To do so means it is out of a need to obfuscate the truth about money or because of scriptural ignorance of the context.

When you break down the text of 1 Corinthians 16:1, what is Paul really dealing with in Corinth? Let's look at the verse. "*Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given orders to churches of Galatia you must do also. On the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper that there be no collections when I come*" (NKJV). Let's add some context to the back-story. The Corinthians who wanted Paul to address some issues asked him a series of six questions.

Paul uses the phrase “now concerning” in three places to give answers to their questions in 1 Corinthians: 1 Corinthians 7:1, asks about marriage; 1 Corinthians 8:1, asks about personal liberty and about food offered to idols; 1 Corinthians 11:1-16 ask about conduct among the congregations; 1 Corinthians 12:1 asks questions about spiritual gifts in the congregation; 1 Corinthians 15 asks about the resurrection. In 1 Corinthians 16:1 Paul uses “now concerning” to address not only the previous questions the Corinthians asked, but also questions about the collection. The purpose of the language, now concerning, is that Paul changed his thought pattern to address the collection question after he dealt with all the previous questions. In Bible study, it is always important to place historical and cultural context, exegesis, and proper hermeneutics above opinion and personal theology before accepting any teaching as the gospel truth. Because context is important, I would like to list some contextual reference points about 1 Corinthians 16:1-3. As you read the Scriptures pertaining to this giving effort, ask yourself if it is possible to assume tithing is the context. I assure you the answer will be no. Here’s why. Of all the questions the Corinthians asked Paul in the epistle, they never uttered a single question about tithes. Paul never said, “now concerning tithes.”

What is the Context of the Giving Event in 1 Corinthians 16:1-3?

- This event is not about tithing. It is about Paul’s address to Gentile believers to help poor Hebrew brethren in Palestine, Judea, and Jerusalem. See 2 Corinthians 8:1-15, 2 Corinthians 9; Galatians 2:10 (the Poor); Acts 11:29-30 and Romans 15:25-26.

- This event was a special collection, saved up weekly over time by the Corinthians and put aside so Paul would not have to begin the collection when he arrived to preach to them.
- This giving addressed a need for Jerusalem believers and does not address systematic general giving that churches practice today. However, this verse could be used as a principle for weekly giving because the context addresses freewill giving, not tithing.
- Some preachers incorrectly argue that since this verse addresses fundraising only, is it assumed that Jews and Gentiles in the church tithed 10 percent as a normal practice.
- This assumption is incorrect because the Jewish Christians took tithes of (crops and cattle) to the temple Levites. No Gentile Christian practiced this tithing obligation because it was for those who grew crops and raised herds and flocks inside the land of Israel.
- Since Paul did not specifically state whether the collection was money or food or both, we have to conclude the intent of this context was to either save up money or food or both based on context. Paul's integrity was so profound that he told the Corinthians to select people they trusted to deliver the collection to Jerusalem. In Paul's context, what would the folks in Corinth need if a famine, poverty, or persecution existed? What is more important, food or money?
- Each of them had to decide the amount they would put aside somewhere to save up. If they saved up money, then the amount would not be the same for every believer each week. The text teaches that each week they had the freedom to choose the amount or change

the amount they saved according to their resources. This indicates that tithing was not the point of Paul's conversation.

- The discussion in First Corinthians 16 does not relate to local church fund-raising except as it might apply to aid for poor Hebrews in Jerusalem. Paul's efforts to seek help from other believers were driven by the events of a famine in regional parts of the land at the time.
- There is also another problem here. Does "collection" in this verse mean money? Most preachers would yell a resounding yes, but not so fast. The verse must be referred back to the book of Acts because there was a famine. Perhaps poverty-stricken believers or another event needed Paul's attention, which motivated him to seek help from others. So would money be a part of the collection or would the collection include food too. Let the Word teach you.
- The word *collection* in the verse means "logia" in the Greek (Strong's #3048) and it means a contribution. So then, is the contribution Paul writes about MONEY only? Or could a contribution or collection consist of anything? That is the question you must answer with word study.
- Paul did not define what the content of the collection was. Why? His audience knew what he was talking about. It is us who interpret and mistakenly conclude that verse only talks about money. But is this verse talking about money only? Maybe or maybe not, but notice Paul did not say, "On the first day of the week let each one of you bring tithes and offerings to the Church." This would be a manipulation of the text by ignoring the context of the verse.

- The context of the verse says the collection for the saints, not for the building fund, the mortgage, the lights, the pastor, and Apostles or for salaries.
- Since a tithe means tenth part and not 10 percent, studying Israel's tithing habits shows that tithing was not equal across the board as 10 percent. For example, in Israel the tithe varies between zero and 10 percent. The vast majority of the time it is less than 10 percent. Here's how the breakdown works. For example, let's look at three cattle herders in Israel. The first has nine sheep, the second has 19 sheep, the third has 20 sheep and the fourth has 30 sheep. So the herder with 9 sheep, his tithe would be zero because the Bible says the tenth animal is holy unto the Lord. He did not have a tenth animal. The herder with 20 sheep, his tithe would be two sheep and the herder with 30 sheep, his tithe would be 3 sheep. According to Leviticus 27:32, every tenth animal was the tithe.

Another example goes like this:

If two farmers had crops of 10 carrots each, they would both be obligated to tithe one carrot. Under the law of Moses, it didn't matter if one sold the other 9 carrots for \$5.00 and the other sold his remaining 9 carrots for \$10. The tithe of the harvest was unrelated to the income; it was 10 percent of one's harvest. To be truly biblical, tithing was not based on income or money at all. Old Testament tithing was mandated and production based. The historical and biblical form of tithing was based on what you were able to produce from the land, plants or livestock. God commanded people to bring a tenth of what they produced from the land BEFORE they sold it. In fact, it was against the law to sell the tithe. One was to bring the product, not what the product was worth (See Leviticus 27:28).⁹¹

The twelve points I listed including 1 Corinthians 16:1-3 cannot be used as a legitimate argument to teach tithes or mandatory offerings for two reasons: 1) the context of the text does not address the habits of first century regular giving or how they gave, whether weekly, bi-weekly or monthly. The verses covered in this chapter only address a special collection; 2) Paul does not directly mention paying 10 percent of income as a tithe in any epistle. If a Pastor uses Paul's writings that reference giving as a mandate for tithes or offerings, he is committing unethical exegesis. What we can say is this, the text is strictly talking about emergency relief efforts for poor saints and the only teaching that can be taught from this text is how we should respond to helping other poor believers in the community of faith. Can we draw other possible giving patterns for modern day churches? Perhaps, but we must be very careful not to go down a slippery scriptural slope where giving becomes necessity or under compulsion.

When reading 1 Corinthians 16:1-3, the following quote by Paul is problematic: "let each one of you lay aside something." Depending on the hermeneutic used, some Bibles use the word *money*. Others say that since the context does not identify the contribution, then it could be money, food or both because the event is about a famine. So the question becomes what is needed most in a famine. I would argue food is the most important. One author offers this analysis by saying:

The words 'let each one of you lay something aside' are literally 'let each of you put by him,' and are reasonably interpreted as the individual setting aside an amount on the first day of the week. To 'put by him' means the giver was to store the gift in his own home. The word translated 'storing up' means to store or treasure up goods for future use,' more simply, to accumulate. Each individual was, on his own, to set aside something week by week, accumulating it in his own home. The translation 'storing up as he' is literally, 'storing up

whatever,' with 'whatever' being the object of 'prosper.' The word translated 'prosper,' *eudoo*, was rare outside the Bible, and means success. The meaning in context is not yield or profit from gainful activities, which the English 'prosper' implies. The meaning is success in gathering the gift, 'gathering all that he can... The idea of success is linked with the result of gathering or saving. The instruction is not 'give as you have financially benefitted' but 'be successful in gathering all you can for the gift.' The intent of Paul's instruction was, 'on the first day of the week let each of you put by him [at home], accumulating whatever has been successfully gathered (saved) out of one's weekly income.' Each believer was to decide the portion he would save out of his weekly income, and set that amount aside, in order to successfully accumulate the gift ('prosper') week by week.⁹²

Much can be said about Paul's effort for this collection; however, it must be clear that the context is not about tithing but about taking care of the needy among God's people.

From an early historical Christian perspective, it is said that:

Some early Christian ministers were itinerant workers, meaning they did not sit in an office or front pew of a church and get paid for existing as resident minister, but they traveled on many occasions to bring the Gospel to other peoples and also encourage believers in different places. Sometimes their purpose was to bring letters and gifts from the saints in one location to the saints in another. Believers in local gatherings would often support this minister by giving him a place to lodge when visiting their town and homes, provide him food to eat and perhaps share some gifts (both financially, spiritually and otherwise) to assist him on his travels. The greatest reward to this minister was the communion of fellowship among his fellow believers and he would gladly spend all and be spent for their sakes.

But when a minister's travel had ceased for any period of time, it was his custom to again take up a job and work for his living. Labor was also the mark of dignity for a man. It was and is the order God had established from the very beginning with Adam. Those who refused to labor for their living were looked down upon in the community as slothful and lazy. Traveling ministers in those days were often lovingly supported, but they did not minister for a price. In fact, those who did "take up" for themselves were viewed as false and were rejected! There is clear evidence of these mindsets present in the earliest historical writings of the Church (and in Paul's New Testament writings). One such example is:

The Didache; The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles (Greek translation = The Teaching) is the common name of a brief early Christian treatise (dated by most scholars to the late first/early second century), containing instructions for Christian communities. From it we can observe how many of the early believers viewed the matter of money in association with ministry.

It states the following [In the Didache]:

If a visiting apostle remains somewhere for 3 days, he's a false prophet -11:5.

If he takes anything from God's people except for a loaf of bread, he's a false prophet -11:6.

If he asks for money, he is a false prophet -11:6.

If someone says in the Spirit, 'give me money,' do not listen to him -11:12.

Christian workers should work for their own bread -12:3.

In no way should anyone live among you unemployed as a Christian -12:4.⁹³

There are many writers who wrote about how early Christian ministers interacted with the faith community. Here's another example:

Itinerate ministers did not live on love offerings and monetary tithes for no such religious system was known among Christ's followers. They were a family of brothers and sisters with a common vision and a common love for Jesus that permeated every facet of their individual and corporate lives. As we have discussed, their travels were indeed sometimes supported with voluntary gifts of the saints and free-will collections were sometimes gathered for the support of the poor, but they (those who ministered the Gospel) most consistently labored for their sustenance and never sought to make themselves a burden to the other believers. This was a principle even among Jewish religious leaders of the day. In fact, the Jews generally believed that a man who does not work is a disgrace. All of the workers in the synagogues also held secular professions!⁹⁴

If this first century document is correct, then Paul writings concerning work are even more important today than ever before, especially for those seeking fame and fortune in the ministry as gospel preaching superstars. Having a secular career is a call of God and in no way does it take away from a ministry calling.

To further illustrate the context of 1 Corinthians Chapter 16, the next chapter is a direct adaptation from author Russell Earl Kelly's, Ph.D, book, *Should The Church Teach Tithing?* He writes in great detail to explain the word collection and how Paul organized the effort to amass the contribution. Russell declares in his research that the contribution was food, not money. Read it with an eye on context, history and personal word study to make your own decision about the contents of the collection.