

## Original Contributions.

## THE CONTRIBUTION.

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Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come. I Cor. xvi. 2.

One does not need to read a dissertation from Paul or Political Economy to know that if the church of today is to do any work commensurate with its strength; if any considerable enterprise is to be engaged in without a guilty waste of effort; yea, if it exists as an organized body at all, it must be by the use of money. Most of the distress and tardiness in the progress of the church in her work of proclaiming the gospel of Christ and converting the world to him is caused by an empty treasury. The empty treasury is the result, I believe, of the unsystematic way we have of contributing of our means to the Lord's service, and the lack of system in church finances very largely grows out of ignorance as to what the scriptures teach concerning this subject.

When the fathers of this reformation began their plea for a restoration of Apostolic Christianity they were inspired with the conviction that God had called them to this work. They believed they had but one message for a divided church, "Back to Jerusalem." They went everywhere delivering that message. In the face of the intensest and bitterest opposition the time and the talents of these mighty men were devoted to their divine mission. They subordinated every other message to this one grand plea for a united church. They totally neglected the teaching of God's holy Word on this subject of contributing to the support of the Lord's cause. Probably that was not the time for it. Their congregations were in the formative period. Time enough to teach the church its duty on this and other subjects pertaining to its existence and perpetuity after its permanent organization was assured. The wisdom of their course we now can clearly see. As a result of this concentration of thought and effort we stand to-day at least fourth in numbers and power in Protestant Christendom, and wield an influence that is being felt and recognized by the entire religious world. But what is our duty now? Learn all God's will on this subject, as well as on every other, just as rapidly as we can, and as we learn it, do it. This exhortation of Paul's in the text may legitimately be made to cover the whole field of Christian giving.

1. It makes the matter of contribution essential to a true Christian life. It comes with all the force of a divine imperative: "Let every one of you." It teaches that every one is as much bound to honor God with his gifts as he is to pray, to believe, to repent, to be baptized, to be chaste. We have rarely been so educated, it is true, and many a gray-haired man, after a life of much excellent service, is going to his grave unlovely and miserly, because he has never learned to bring his money into subjection to the will of his Lord. Christ will master a man's love of money, or the love of money

will master the man. It is criminal ignorance to press and hold the "preaching of the gospel" between the narrow lines of "first principles." We have very many congregations to-day—thank God! the number is daily decreasing—zealous of the faith once delivered to the saints, who have almost no idea that Christian giving is a part of Christian living. We must learn that we are not living in obedience to our Lord and King until we "abound in this grace also."

2. This text teaches that *the giving is to be universal*. "Let every one of you." Paul requires that every member of the church, then, shall pay something into the Lord's treasury. Luke, the historian of the early church, in speaking of the first Christians, says: "They continued steadfastly in the Apostles' doctrine and in the fellowship and in the breaking of bread and in prayers." We have always comprehended and properly emphasized the duty of continuing steadfast in observing the first and the two last, but we have utterly ignored the second, viz., the fellowship. What is meant by this word fellowship so often found in the Word of God? It means *partnership, common interest*; membership in the church, then, meant a partnership. We have always recognized it as such whether we have so understood it or not. Each person becoming a member of our society gives and receives from the church "the right hand of Christian fellowship." It means that such person has voluntarily accepted and entered into a partnership with every other member of the organization to share equally, according to ability, the burdens and duties and responsibilities growing out of that partnership. There should be a "fellowship" in the work of the church, of the whole church, *every member of it*. In this work of bearing the financial burdens of the church there is a fellowship or partnership, as there is in the promises and blessings of the gospel. No one can justly claim to be in the fellowship of a church when he does not help to bear its expenses, if able to do so. It should be made a matter of conscience. We have some in our churches who display a great deal of conscience on the question of baptizing in a baptism or worshipping with an organ; who exercise no manner of conscience on as plain a matter of duty as paying their part of the expenses of the work of the church. We do right in our business affairs with men. Shall we do otherwise with the Lord? If we were in partnership with a man in business, would we not pay our part of the expenses? Dare we do less when we enter into partnership to do the work of the Lord? But, you ask, suppose we are not able to pay anything? I answer, Paul enjoins the duty upon those whom the Lord hath prospered. If he has not prospered you, then you are not expected to contribute. It has been my experience, however, and it is true within our own congregation, that the poorest members *always do contribute*. One dear sister, making her living at the wash-tub, who emphatically refused to be eased, declaring that she should not be happy without bearing her part in this blessed fellowship. There is scarcely a member who is not able to pay at least one cent a week. But, I am asked, suppose some are able and refuse to pay anything? I answer, they have broken the covenant they voluntarily entered into when they gave and received the right hand of fellowship. They are, therefore, no longer fit for membership. If a man will not be honest with his brethren and with his God, he should be admonished, and if he continues to be a sponge upon the church and the liberality of his brethren he should be counted a "robber of God," and,

after the second and third admonition, if he does not repent, he should be dealt with according to Paul as a "covetous man, who is an idolater." Again, every member should pay for *himself*, old and young. This will create a sense of *personal responsibility*. When a father pays for the whole family it relieves the children of a sense of obligation and of a personal interest in the work of the church. Let everyone, father, mother, daughter and son pay for him or herself, and then when the parents are dead and gone the children will continue to recognize their personal obligation to the Lord and his cause.

3. The text teaches further that the giving is to be *proportioned to ability*, "as the Lord has prospered him." Not according "to that he hath not, but as he hath so let him give." Not as some one else gives, but as the Lord has prospered *you*. The standard of our contributions to the Lord's work is not the generosity or penuriousness of any one else, but the grace of God towards us. The question should not be, as it too frequently is, how much has Bro. A. given, but how much has the Lord done for *me*, thus putting me under obligation to him to respond in proportion to his blessing. Paul says: "Let a man examine *himself*, and so let him give." The custom some have of looking over a subscription list to see how much some one else has "put down," to be taken as a measure for their own contribution, is wrong. We ought to recognize our blessings from God—make up our minds to respond to his generosity and liberality, and then pay irrespective of what any one else gives. We do not measure our hope by another's, nor our faith, nor our love, and we should not measure our gifts. O Christians, count up the blessings we enjoy, material and spiritual! What do we possess? Pleasures countless! Blessings unnumbered—all from the *giver of every good*. Spiritual blessings—how many? Go out and look up into the clear, blue sky and night and tell the stars. How many? Innumerable! Infinitely more are the blessings that have come to us through Christ, his church and the Bible. Now how much should we contribute to his cause? Listen, "As the Lord hath prospered you!" God grant that we may heed his word and make this the rule of our life!

4. Every one should give a *proportion of his increase*. The point considered under the preceding head is the basis of this and makes this necessary. How shall we give as the Lord has prospered us? *Proportion* our giving. I believe that at this point we will find one of the chief causes of a lack of funds with which to do the work of the church. We should consecrate, *sanctify*, a definite per cent of our increase to be paid into the Lord's treasury. Decide upon a certain per cent as the *least* of your contributions. Consider that amount as consecrated money—sacred to the Lord—not to be used for anything not distinctly the Lord's work. When this point is settled you have the advantage of knowing at any time that you have a definite amount that is the Lord's without having to determine how much you can now pay. Many give as they feel—make their contributions depend upon the caprice of feeling instead of upon a conviction of duty. This is all wrong. Sometimes we feel good, and at other times indifferent and careless. Now, if we have not sanctified a portion of our increase our contributions will vary according to the state of our feelings, and the Lord's cause is bound to suffer in consequence. We do not pay our debts to men, because we *feel* like it, but because it is our *duty* to pay, and we use a sufficient proportion of our income with which to meet these