




---

Conducted by  
Alf Marsden

---

**“Every Sunday the presiding Brother passes the collection bag “For the Lord’s work.” What exactly is the Lord’s work, and does it include good work to non-members?”**

In answering this question, and since ‘collecting bags’ are mentioned, I shall assume that ‘good works’ to non-members means either financial help from the treasury, or things bought with money from the treasury. Furthermore, the Lord’s work could mean either the work of the Lord God, or the work of the Lord Jesus Christ; in this case, however, there could be no real distinction because they would be complementary regarding the work that needed to be done. Finally, it is **money** which is being referred to here, because that is what is put into the collecting bag.

#### GIVING

As this is a question about **using** rather than giving, I shall not be exhaustive in dealing with the letter. Nevertheless, there are one or two pertinent points which need to be made.

The post-Pentecostal saints had evidently, according to Acts 2: 44-47 and Acts 4: 32-37, been greatly motivated to give. This was either because they had been at the ‘sharp end’ of the sacrifice of Jesus and wanted to respond equally sacrificially, or they were ‘clearing the decks’, so to speak, for the imminent return of the Lord (the latter may sound a little brutal but it is not intended to be; they would undoubtedly have shown great love for the brethren even in this). An interesting point is that they were not all poor; some had land and possessions to sell. Anyway, they gave liberally, and their liberality was administered by the Apostles.

In his letter to Corinth, Paul takes up the same theme; they were to give as they were *prospered*. See 1 Cor. 16:2. You will notice in v1 that he says it was “**a collection for the saints,**” but we’ll return to that later. No doubt the words of Jesus would be remembered, “**For whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more.**” Luke 12:48.

So the principle was established in the early days: they who had much *should* give more; they who didn’t have much probably *couldn’t* give much, but they could give *something*. Paul is at pains to point out in 2 Cor. chapters 8 and 9, that there should be a relative equality both in giving and receiving. This has been referred to as the first communist society, but it is far removed from the Marxist philosophy; it was far more altruistic than Marxism could ever be. The really important point, though, is given in 2 Cor. 8:5, where Paul says, “**but (they) first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God.**”

#### USING

The ‘giving’ is unto the Lord, but each community of Christians is responsible for the stewardship of that which is given. Ideally, the administration of Church finances should be by Elders and Deacons. When we have given into the treasury, we shouldn’t keep peering over the shoulders of these men to see how they administer it; we put them in office, and consequently we should trust them. They should, however, keep their respective assemblies fully informed, and if there seems to be a misuse of funds then the church has a right to ask questions. So how *can* the Lord’s money be used according to scripture?

*Relief of Saints*

In 2 Cor. 8:2 Paul speaks about “the great trial of affliction,” and the “deep poverty” of the saints in Macedonia. Yet in great joy they were willing to give “beyond their power” in liberality for the relief of other saints. With “prayer and much intreaty” they asked Paul to receive their gift. The Apostle tells the saints at Corinth about this and asks the saints there for “a performance out of that which ye have.” There are three pre-requisites: (a) a willing mind, (b) a gift out of that which a man *has*, (c) a desire for equality: there is also the proviso, as I mentioned earlier, that the giver has first given *himself* to the Lord.

We must bear in mind that we refer to the 1st century A.D., and a time of incipient Christianity. Even though the Gospel had brought great blessings of grace, it had also brought greater problems to those who accepted it. The hostility which had been directed at Christ would henceforth be directed at His followers. Furthermore, the Gospel, with its promise of ‘untold wealth’, would appeal to the poor. Most of these would no doubt exhibit genuine faith, but there would be those who would be looking for more tangible rewards in the immediate future, not realising, or not having been taught, that the *constraints* which they had lived under would be replaced by *restraints* which obedience to the Gospel would lay on them. Whatever the reason, there would be those who would need help, and it was part of the Apostles’ work to see that they got it. Both rich and poor had *something* to contribute; the fact that *both* should give out of what they *had* was, perhaps, a painful lesson which many would have to learn.

The Church is now in the 20th century. Poverty and riches are relative terms and, in spite of the Welfare State, poverty still exists; we are still a long way from a classless society. Consequently, there will be saints who need help today, and the Church, in its several localities, should supply that help out of the gifts made to God by the brethren.

*Relief of Non-Christians*

Is this a scriptural concept? Yes, it is! Who can doubt what is stated and implied in the parable of the Good Samaritan? And who can misunderstand what Jesus said as recorded by Matthew (25:33-46)? Furthermore in Gal. 6:10 Paul says, “As we have therefore opportunity let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.”

The crux of the matter can be simply stated: is such teaching meant for individual Christians to comply with in *addition* to their contributions to the church treasury? or can help be given *from* the church treasury. I have known Christians who, in a desire to help good causes, have kept back money which they would normally have put into the treasury. That, of course, raises another problem, viz., is that the right thing to do? I know my own inclination, but the problem is a personal one, and depends very much on circumstances, financial or otherwise. The most crucial aspect of this question is what we perceive the character of the Godhead to be. We give to the Lord for His work. Can we conceive of a situation where God and Christ, if they saw real distress in *anyone*, would withhold that which *we* had, in faith, given to them? I think not, and therefore I believe that non-Christians can be helped, on a selective basis, out of church funds, irrespective of what *individuals* may want to do in addition.

*Other ‘Work’*

Take worship. O know this isn’t strictly a ‘work’, but I believe all equipment on the Lord’s Table should be bought out of church funds. Why? Because if individuals bought it, they would look on this as *their* ‘work of faith’, and anything which can elevate the individual above his Lord, – even in his own mind – should be avoided. Absurd, you say? Well, why do people want stones into the side of church buildings with their names on them. To elevate the Lord, or to see their own names.

The promotion of the Gospel is, of course, God's work, and can be supported out of that which we give to Him. But what do we mean by 'Gospel work'? Is it just supporting full-time workers, printing tracts, sending money overseas, or are there other *ancillary* costs which have to be met? Take the 'special effort' or the 'Bible Fellowship'. Can the costs of accommodation be supported out of the treasury? Some members might be prohibited from taking people into their homes because of the lack of cash; others who *do* may find it difficult to 'make ends meet' because of extra domestic costs for food, etc. Can such be helped from the treasury to help defray such costs? After all, it can all be described as 'Gospel work'. I know some will remind me of the 'extra mile' teaching but I think that misses the point I am making. I am of the opinion that whatever a church organises it does not organise it for its **entertainment value**. I take it that the aim is to equip, strengthen, and prepare the saints, as a community, for the doing of 'God's work'. If that is the case, then I see no reason for withholding financial help from the treasury. We must look at the broader aspects of 'God's work'.

(All questions, please, to Alf Marsden,  
20 Costessy Way, Winstanley, Wigan. WN3 6ES.)