

The New Testament Pattern of Giving

By [Wayne Jackson](#)

It is a strange phenomenon in today's church. Many recognize that there are rules regulating worship.

They understand that the music portion of the worship is to be conducted with a *cappella* singing. Informed Christians recognize the proper communion elements — bread and fruit of the vine. The day and frequency for the observance of the supper are carefully memorialized **each Sunday**.

And they vigorously and correctly protest any presumptuous attempt to alter these ordinances.

But some Christians seem to think there are **no principles regulating weekly giving in the assembly**.

With some, there seems to be a “design-your-own-system” with a flippant “it's-nobody's-business-what-I-do” disposition when it comes to Christian contribution.

If the Lord **prescribed a pattern** for what we do in other acts of worship, is it reasonable to think that he left the matter of giving **entirely optional** or ambiguous?

Paul discussed several **requirements** for congregational giving in 1 Corinthians 16:1-2.

Now concerning the collection for the saints, do the same thing that I commanded the Galatian churches; every Sunday, let each one of you lay aside by himself, if he earns anything, and put it in the treasury; so that there will be no collections when I come (*McCord's Translation*).

The Contextual Background of 1 Corinthians 16:1-2

When Paul, Barnabas, and Titus, went to assure the Jerusalem church of Paul's valid apostleship and the genuineness of the gospel he preached (Gal. 2:1), he was readily endorsed.

James, the half brother of the Lord, along with Peter and John, extended to Paul the “right hand of fellowship” in the noble work in which they all were involved. They did, however, encourage Paul to “remember the poor,” which he was most zealous to do (Gal. 2:10).

For six years prior to the composition of 1 Corinthians, the great preacher had demonstrated his concern for the needy. He had been busily involved in assisting the poor among the saints at Jerusalem (cf. Rom. 15:24-25; 2 Cor. 8-9; Acts 24:17).

In the apostle's mind, there was no segregation of benevolence from evangelism. Benevolence **is evangelism** (Mt. 5:16; Gal. 6:10)!

These circumstances provide the background context of 1 Corinthians 16:1-4.

The Command for Congregational Giving

Note that the instruction conveyed in 1 Corinthians 16:1-2 is in the form of a command (“order,” ASV; *diatasso* found 16 times in the New Testament).

Some examples illustrate the word's usage and demonstrate the **imperative nature** of the language.

When Jesus finished “commanding” his disciples, he departed to preach in their cities (Mt. 11:1). Aquila and Priscilla left Rome because Claudius Caesar had “commanded” all Jews to depart from Rome (Acts 18:2).

The following instructions in this Corinthian letter are not **optional suggestions**. They constitute a pattern of fulfilling sacred duties.

Some object to this conclusion. Paul would later write to this church regarding this same collection, “I speak not by way of commandment, but as proving through the earnestness of others the sincerity also of your love” (2 Cor. 8:8). The claim is that this subsequent letter negates 1 Corinthians 16:1-2 as a binding pattern.

Regarding this seeming discrepancy, one may observe:

- The matter of supporting the cause of God in its various needs is unquestionably a sacred obligation.
- The specific **use** of received funds through this responsibility is a matter of judgment.
- The general procedure for carrying out financial obligations is **prescribed**.
- It is better to motivate by love than by coercion, when possible.

Professor Hodge of Princeton Theological Seminary once observed:

This [“order”] is the language of authority. For although these contributions were voluntary, and were required to be made cheerfully, 2 Corinthians 9:7, yet they were a duty, and therefore both the collection itself, and the mode in which it should be accomplished, were proper subjects for apostolic direction (362).

The Frequency of Required Giving

The frequency of contributing is “every Sunday.” The Greek literally says: “the first day of **every** week” (cf. Mt. 27:15; Lk. 2:41).

It is a mystery as to why the force of the distributive preposition *kata* (every) was not made evident in the KJV/ASV translations (see Danker, *et al.*, 512).

One should budget his finances, therefore, so as to be able to give **each Lord’s day**. If one is ill, or away, thus unable to contribute at his local congregation, he should make provisions to leave his contribution behind or else make it up when he returns.

One is obligated to contribute as consistently as he has “prospered.” It is not right for a few to bear virtually the full expenses of local work, while others “ride free.”

Individual Responsibility

For each family income, there must be a gift. If the husband is the sole wage earner, he obviously will be the only source for a gift. If the wife has a separate income, she must contribute from that as well.

When Christian teens have a job, they must give from their income. If they receive an allowance, a portion of that belongs to the Lord.

If older folks are on social security, they are not exempt from this act of worship. “Each one” means “everyone” who prospers to any degree — rich or poor, young or old, male or female.

Giving into the Treasury

The next portion of the passage is the most controversial. Is the Christian obligated to contribute into the “treasury” of the local church? What does the phrase “lay by him in store” mean?

The expression “by him” (*par heatou*) is frequently assumed to suggest, “save up at home.”

The Seventh-day Adventists have long contended for this view in an effort to negate the first-century evidence for Sunday worship (Canright, 207-08). But the evidence does not support that view.

The phrase “by him” most likely means, “let him take to himself what he means to give” (Hodge, 365). Or the words may be considered as a neuter form, “by itself” (McGarvey, 161) or “to put something aside” (Danker, 268). James MacKnight rendered the full phrase: “lay by itself putting it into the appointed treasury” (208).

The phrase “in store” derives from *thesaurizon* — an imperative mood (a command), present tense (repetitious action), participle. The verbal action depicts consistently depositing something in a “treasury” (*thesaurus*).

Each Christian has an obligation to help sustain the local church treasury. This obligation is regardless of the extra missionary or benevolent work to which he may otherwise contribute as an individual.

Some, in an attempt to negate church responsibility, dispute that the early church had “treasuries” at this point in time.

“It is improbable that at that time there was any Church treasury, and not until much later was money collected during public worship” (Robertson / Plummer 384).

And so, as noted above, a common allegation is that the “storing up” was what the individual did at his home.

This is pure speculation and quite contrary to the **explicit testimony** of the passage. This congregation and others (e.g., those in Galatia) were **ordered** to give “every first day of the week.” Moreover, common sense dictates that the monies collected had to be safely kept **somewhere**.

Leon Morris noted that since “Paul expressly deprecates the collecting of the money when he arrives (which would be necessary if they all had it laid by at home) it is perhaps better to think of it as being stored in the church treasury” (238). See a similar discussion in Shore, VII.353.

The modern translations (e.g., Wuest) and commentary assertions (e.g., Fee, 813) that the phrase signifies, “put aside at home,” are entirely unwarranted. There is no “at home” in the text — either stated or implied (cf., *contra* Thayer, 168).

Appeals to texts in classical literature are irrelevant to **this context**. This “at home” business is the very circumstance Paul was endeavoring to prevent. He intended that “no collections be made when I come.”

Another scholar responds:

Some have interpreted the words *par heauto* (literally ‘by himself’) to mean ‘at home.’ But then why mention doing it on Sunday, when they could just as well do it regularly at home at other times? The meaning must rather be that the Christians were to bring their offerings to church on Sunday, since that was the day they assembled for worship (Acts 20:7; Rev. 1:10). It is significant that the early church father, Justin Martyr (second century A.D.) testified that contributions to the church were received on that day (Apology I, 67.6) (Mare, 293).

Another writer has observed that since the “laying by” was to “be done on the day of their religious assembly, and so that there should be no trouble or time lost in collecting it when he [Paul] came, it is rather to be inferred that on each Sunday it was to be deposited in the treasury of the church” (Sadler, 299).

The celebrated historian, Mosheim, in describing the Lord’s day worship of the first-century church, stated that: “Every Christian, who was in an opulent condition, and indeed every one, according to their circumstances, brought with them their gifts, and offered them, as it were, unto the Lord” (I.35-36).

Under the Old Testament regime, the Hebrews were not allowed to be “free-lancers” with their “tithes.” Rather, the Lord charged: “Bring the whole tithe into the store-house [“treasury” cf. Job 38:22], so that there may be food in my house” (Mal. 3:10).

Similarly, Christians have a primary duty to the local church. They may not act as independent agents in their giving to the Lord.

The assertion of some commentators that this injunction is not a pattern and holds no authority for today is a reckless statement of no basis. It wholly **ignores the command language** at the commencement of the passage, as well as the application of the instruction beyond Corinth (1 Cor. 1:2; 16:1).

Proportional Giving Imposed

The expression, “as he may prosper” is one word in Greek (*euodotai*) — a present tense, passive voice verb in the subjunctive mood (most likely). The subjunctive is the mood of possibility. The present tense reflects an action in progress. The passive voice indicates that the subject is the recipient of action — in this case, prosperity from God.

The term itself basically means “prosperous journey.” It suggests this idea. To whatever degree he “is prospered” by God, week-by-week, he must contribute a portion to the Lord’s work “according to his ability” (Acts 11:29; cf. the exceptional “beyond their power” — 2 Cor. 8:3).

The more one is prospered, the more he should give. As he prospers less, less giving is required. As Christ once expressed the principle: “to whomsoever much is given, of him much shall be required” (Luke 12:48b).

Still, the amount expected seems vague. Is there **more precision** that might be anticipated, beyond the general principle — “to the degree one is blessed”?

We do not live under the Old Testament economy. But there are many incidental truths we can learn from those documents that help us in understanding various elements of truth.

For example, Paul appealed to the law of Moses to establish that one who exerts considerable labor in a cause is worthy of financial support (1 Tim. 5:17; cf. Deut. 23:4).

The Precedent of the Old Testament Tithe

In the earliest age of Old Testament history, the patriarchal period, there are two examples of great servants of the Lord offering gifts to the Creator from their prosperity.

Abraham gave to Melchizedek, Jehovah’s priest, ten percent of the “chief spoils” he recently had taken from pagan kings (Gen. 14:20; Heb. 7:4). Later, Jacob dreamt of the ladder that reached from earth to heaven, with its ascending and descending angels. He subsequently set up a pillar to memorialize the occasion and pledged to give a tenth of his resources to Jehovah (Gen. 28:22).

The Mosaic law **formalized** the tithe (a tenth) as the required giving of Israel (Lev. 27:30-32). In addition, they offered various sacrifices and gave “free-will” offerings. So actually, they gave much more than the tithe (a portion being considered taxation). But ten percent appears to have been the very minimum (cf. Mal. 3:10).

Gospel ministers have not rendered a balanced service when they dismiss the Old Testament principles by teaching: “We do not live under the law of Moses. Therefore we are not required to tithe.” At best, it leaves the impression with some that **no direction at all** is available. Many conclude that we are free to give as far **below** that level as we desire!

Of course, many are happy to accommodate themselves to a significantly smaller amount.

The Higher Ideal of Christian Giving

One of the major designs of the book of Hebrews is to show the superiority of the new covenant of Jesus Christ over the former covenant given through Moses.

Again and again, the sacred writer uses the comparative term “better” to mark the qualitative distinction of the latter over the former.

Christ, as the giver of the new covenant, is “better” than the angels, through whom the old regime came (Heb. 1:4). We have a “better hope” (i.e., as priests ourselves; 1 Pet. 2:5, 9) with direct access to God (Heb. 7:21).

The new covenant is a “better covenant” because of the unchangeable priesthood of our Savior (Heb. 7:22). The ministry of Christ is a “more excellent” one. Indeed it is a “better covenant” enacted upon “better promises” (Heb. 8:6).

The new covenant is one with “better sacrifices” (Heb. 9:23) — a reference to the sacrifice of our Lord. [Note: The plural form is designed to correspond with the “sacrifices” of the Levitical system, but with a symbolic emphasis — suggesting the excellence of Christ’s offering, “perfect in all its parts” (Bengel, IV.426).]

In view of all this, how could a conscientious Bible student ever come to the conclusion that we may **sacrifice less** than the ancient patriarchs or the nation of Israel? We have **far more** revelation and tremendously **greater** blessings than they enjoyed. So shouldn’t that realization compel us to a greater level of service?











We must give consistently, generously, and joyfully (2 Cor. 9:7).

How could any informed Christian possibly contend that he, as a beneficiary of the new covenant and as a part of the body of Jesus Christ, could love God less and thus **give less** than the Jew who professes to honor God, but knows not our Savior?

There is little doubt that if all Christians gave **as much as** ten percent of their incomes, our contributions would soar far above what they now are!

Here is a mathematical challenge to your faith. Multiply your present contribution by ten and ask God to bless you with an **income** in that amount. And perhaps hope he doesn’t!

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Scripture References

1 Corinthians 16:1-2; Galatians 2:1; Galatians 2:10; Romans 15:24-25; 2 Corinthians 8-9; Acts 24:17; Matthew 5:16; Galatians 6:10; 1 Corinthians 16:1-4; Matthew 11:1; Acts 18:2; 2 Corinthians 8:8; 2 Corinthians 9:7; Matthew 27:15; Luke 2:41; Acts 20:7; Revelation 1:10; Job 38:22; Malachi 3:10; 1 Corinthians 1:2, 16:1; Acts 11:29; 2 Corinthians 8:3; Luke 12:48; 1 Timothy 5:17; Deuteronomy 23:4; Genesis 14:20; Hebrews 7:4; Genesis 28:22; Leviticus 27:30-32; Hebrews 1:4; 1 Peter 2:5, 9; Hebrews 7:21; Hebrews 7:22; Hebrews 8:6; Hebrews 9:23

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