

Sabbath Giving

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[0 : 00] Now we'll deal this evening really just with the two opening verses of this chapter, in which there are two main elements of importance, both of which we have touched on and dealt with, to a sense, in the past.

But insofar as they present themselves here in these opening verses, I think they necessitate some attention to be unpacked a bit, and Lord willing, for Spare next week, we'll look at the chapter then as a whole and the content of it.

But these opening verses are key. And there are two things, two elements really in these opening verses. Firstly, there is the collection for the saints. That is for the relief of want and distress amongst fellow believers, particularly in Judea, as we see at verse 3, to send your liberality unto Jerusalem.

Now this is something of a recurring theme in Paul's ministry. We find it, for example, in Acts chapter 11, And if we go back there, at the Acts of the Apostles, we see there, verses 28 to 30, there stood up one of them named Agabus, and signified by the Spirit there should be great dearth throughout all the world, which came to pass in the days of Claudius Caesar.

Then the disciples, this is in Antioch, the city in Antioch, that every man, according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judea, which also they did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.

[1 : 28] And again, in Acts 24, verse 17, Paul explicitly says, This is towards the end of his physically active ministry, and here he is again bringing a collection for the saints, for the believers, in the gospel in Jerusalem.

So it's a recurring theme throughout Paul's ministry. And in Romans chapter 15, verse 26, it is almost certainly the present Corinthian collection to which Paul is referring there.

And again, 2 Corinthians chapter 9, verses 1 to 4, in similar vein. I won't read out all these passages, but again, it's there through so much of his writing, through so much of his letters.

And the reason why it was specifically Judea that received most of this aid may have been partly to do with gratitude that the gospel had gone out from there to all the Gentile world.

That may very well be the case. It may have been because of famine. Remember that we just read in Acts 11 that Agabus had prophesied it would be a death, a shortage throughout all the Roman Empire.

[2 : 44] But that was to affect everybody, not just Judea. But it is most probably, and we can only say probably, speculation to an extent, but it is most probably because the sell everything policy adopted by the early church in Jerusalem, which we've got in Acts 4, you know, all those who had property, they sold it, laid down the money at the feet of the apostles, and that was great, and everybody shared, and everybody had enough, and so on.

But that had probably inevitably run out. You can only do that so many times. If you're doing it, selling it all, then you can only do it once. And eventually, far sooner than people probably imagine, everything is spent, and there was now real financial hardship for believers in Jerusalem.

The primary concern of this collection is fellow believers. Not in the negative sense of ignoring or refusing to help anyone else in need, but rather in the sense that if anyone is duty-bound to care for the needs of suffering believers, surely it is their fellow believers.

In other words, the responsibility to help Christians in need falls primarily on other Christians. Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ, as Paul wrote to the Galatians, chapter 6, verse 2.

Believers are one family, and we read, of course, in 1 Timothy, chapter 5, verse 8, but if any provide not for his own, and especially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse

than an infidel.

[4 : 29] Now, in practice, there are many organisations and bodies whose business is the poor in general, and there are some organisations concerned simply with the poor of other faiths, but very, very few, apart from other believers, will ever be motivated to give to and care for the relief specifically of suffering Christians.

Very, very few. In fact, unless they are Christians themselves, nobody's going to target their aid on the relief specifically of Christians. In a very real sense, if we don't do it, nobody will.

Of course, it is still worthy and good for Christians to give to charities in general. It is to be encouraged, but the first call on the giving of a Christian ought to be Christian causes, and other charities after that.

So the collection for the saints is the first element. And I know we've dealt to an extent with stewardship and tithing in the past. We're going to look at that again, of course, as we look at this collection. But secondly, there is a specific mention of the first day of the week.

And I know we've dealt with the Sabbath in the subject of the confession of faith and of religious worship on the Sabbath day, but the focus specifically here in this verse is the looking at it being the new Sabbath, the first day of the week.

[5 : 52] That's the context here. The first day of the week, this was the day that the apostolic church met for worship and kept special. Firstly, because it was the day of the resurrection, an event which was absolutely central to Christian witness.

You know, if we go back to Acts chapter 1, then that's what we find there. It's the central thing, verses 21 and 22, wherefore, Peter says, of these men which have accompanied with us all the time of the Lord Jesus were in and out among us beginning from the baptism of John until that same day that he was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection.

And we saw in previous weeks when we looked at chapter 15 and so on, the centrality of the resurrection in Paul's doctrine. But we might still justifiably ask, why this day?

You know, why, first day of the week, why not meet and worship on the old Jewish Sabbath? Already well established in practice in the Jewish church and in scripture and so on, why not meet on the old Jewish Sabbath?

Well, one could say, of course, maybe the Corinthians weren't Jews. But the Christians everywhere observe this first day of the week, Jews, as well as Gentiles.

[7 : 11] and one might even say, well, okay, but what authority did they have to change the holy day from the last in the week to the first? What authority to do in the church on the Christian Sabbath once they did in the synagogue on the Jewish Sabbath?

You know, is the resurrection enough of a justification? Well, if they needed any such authority, if the apostles were in need of such authority, if they were to change the day, they had that authority directly from Jesus.

That's what we read in Matthew 16, verse 19, where Jesus said, I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

And under that authority, if it is determined by the apostles on earth that the first day is now the holy day, the day of worship and devotion to God and rest from worldly activity, then it is so not only in earth but in heaven too.

Does Christ have the authority to give such powers to change a day fixed initially by his Father at creation? Well, you could say, well, Jesus says, all power is given unto me in heaven and earth.

[8 : 32] Yes, but also, remember we read in Mark 2, verse 28, the Son of Man is Lord also of the Sabbath. He's Lord of all creation. How much more is he Lord specifically of this day?

But we might say, but okay, he could, but did Jesus, you know, actually choose this day? Okay, the apostles, they're meeting everywhere, Jews and Gentiles, it's always the first day of the week.

You know, did they have the authority to change it? They did, if that's what they did. Did Jesus have the authority to give them that power? Yes, he did, but did Jesus choose this day above any other day to be special, to be holy?

Fair enough, he had the power, but did he really sanctify this day above any other, including the old Jewish Sabbath, which was so precious as appointed by his Father in the Old Testament and so on?

You know, did he? Oh, we would have to say, yes, he made this day so special because when he rose from the dead, the central fact of the entire Christian faith, the entire basis of Paul's religion is the resurrection.

[9 : 41] When he rose from the dead, this was the day in which Christ chose repeatedly, not just once here and there, but repeatedly to show himself to his disciples usually when they were gathered together.

We look at Luke chapter 44, verses 1 and 2. Now, upon the first day of the week, now, when we looked at the Sabbath in the confession of faith, how this means literally upon the first Sabbath, we'll leave that aside, let's just call it the first day of the week, very early in the morning, they came unto the sepulcher, bringing the spices which they had prepared and certain others with them and found the stone rolled away from the sepulcher.

Verse 13, we read that it says, behold, two of them went that same day to a village called Emmaus, which was from Jerusalem, at three school of furlongs, and they talked together of all these things which had happened and it came to pass.

While they communed together and reasoned, Jesus himself drew near and went with them. So he has appeared to them on the road to Emmaus, he appears again.

Verse 33, they rose up the same hour, still the same day, first day of the week, returned to Jerusalem, found the eleven gathered together, them that were with them, and they told them what things had happened. Verse 36, as they thus spake, Jesus himself stood in the midst of them and said unto them, Peace be unto you.

[11 : 06] He keeps appearing this same day. You might say, ah, yeah, but that's the first day that he's risen from the dead. Whatever day of the week it was, he was going to make sure as many people as possible saw him, okay?

You'll know, I'm sure, about the instance of doubting Thomas there, John 20, verse 19, the same day at evening, this is the first day of the week, being the first day of the week when the doors were shut, when the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst and said unto them, Peace be unto you.

Verse 26, remember Thomas wasn't with them, he doubted that they had seen the Lord as well, except as you'll see in his hands the print of the nails, put my finger at the print of the nails, thrust my hand in his side, I'll not believe.

After eight days again, his disciples were with him and Thomas would there. Then came Jesus, the doors being shut and stood in the midst and said, Peace be unto you.

And I think, ah, eight days, that would make it Monday. Well, no, it wouldn't because when the Jews counted days, they counted the day on which something was actually happening as the first day.

[12 : 10] that's why you could say, you know, Jesus rose from the dead the third day because the first day is the day that he is crucified, the Friday. The second day is the day that he's in the tomb all day, all night.

The third day he rises from the dead. But you count the first day as being the day of the crucifixion. So after eight days means the first day of the week when he appears to the disciples and then you've got Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, and then the Lord's day, the eighth day.

That's when he appears the second day. Why didn't he appear in between times? Why didn't he appear on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday? Why didn't he appear on the old Jewish Sabbath and appear to Thomas? He could have chosen any day.

He could have waited between sightings till the old Jewish Sabbath came around. But as we have seen, he waited instead between sightings till the first day came around, the Lord's day.

He could have sanctified any day of the week that he chose, Monday, Wednesday, Friday, any other day that he chose. Jesus chose the first day of the week. He sanctified it with his repeated appearances and presence.

[13 : 23] And it is this sanctified state, this holiness, which is the first requirement in biblical Sabbath observes. Exodus 20, verse 8, remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy, holiness.

In Genesis chapter 2, verse 3, it says, God blessed the Sabbath day and sanctified it, made it holy. Now, by making these constant appearances to his disciples on this specific day, Jesus is sanctifying this day, giving it a special status, which no other day of the week has.

it has become the Lord's own day in a way that not even the old Sabbath was. Now, if holiness then be our first requirement for the Christian Sabbath, it is incumbent upon us that whatever we do on this holy day should be honoring to the Son of Man who is Lord also of the Sabbath.

It is also, of course, the whole day that we are called upon to devote to him for that is the example we have from the apostles. Not just as some would have it, you know, a quick service in church in the morning then out on the golf course for the rest of the day.

It was the whole day. Now, we see this, you know, in Acts 20, for example, where we see at verse 7 where you've got the case of Eutychus where Paul gathers the disciples together before he goes into Macedonia and they go there three months and they accompanied him into Asia, Sophodor of Dorea and so on.

[15:01] Then these going before sailed before it, tarried for us at Troas, we sailed away from Philippi after the days of unleavened bread, came unto Troas in five days. Where we abode seven days.

They've been in Troas for a week. And upon the first day of the week when the disciples came together to break bread, it's routine, first day of the week, disciples come together for worship, Paul preached unto them ready to depart on the morrow and continue, his speech until midnight.

They are gathered together, they're worshipping, they're sanctifying the Lord and his day all the way through to the very end of the day. He continued his speech until midnight and he was planning to go off early the next day.

He went off on what we would call the Monday, not the Lord's Day. Paul preached unto them ready to depart on the morrow and he preached on the night, the whole day is taken up with the things of the Lord.

Rest from work is simply that we may the better and more single-mindedly focus upon the Lord and rejoice in him and his day. It is perfectly possible to keep the old Jewish Sabbath without honouring the Son of Man who is Lord of the Sabbath.

[16:16] millions of unconverted Jews do it every week. They keep the old Jewish Sabbath but they don't honour Jesus of Nazareth the Christ of God by doing so.

But it is not possible to keep the Christian Sabbath, the Lord's Day, without at least indirectly and even silently proclaiming the authority of the Lord of the Sabbath.

it is a badge of who we are and whom we serve. And because it is recognised as such, however subtly in the spiritual warfare that goes on around us all the time, why else would there be such a clamour to deregulate it?

Why would there be such an insistence? Yes, we're going to have more shops, bigger shops, super stores open. Yes, we're going to have the ferries and the planes and everything. What is the big infringement of human rights that was there?

It was, everybody gets a day off. Oh, how cruel, oh, how terrible, my goodness, a violation of my human rights. No, the reason that people want it destroyed is because it is a silent testimony to the Lord of the Sabbath.

[17:32] It is not possible to have everything stilled on this day without everybody saying, why is it this day that's everybody stilled? Oh, because it's the Lord's day, because it's the Sabbath and so we are silently honoring, we're testamenting to whose day this is, not just our day, we don't just do what we like in it, it's this day.

And this is one reason it is so resented by those who so resent the Lord. It is a badge of whose we are and whom we serve. Now, as we mentioned when we looked at the subject of the Sabbath and the Confession of Faith, just to recap briefly, this Christian Sabbath is Trinitarian.

here in its observance and we commemorate the work of all three persons of the Trinity, the work of the Father in creation, the first day of the week, God said, let there be light.

Oh, no, what's light? The work of the Son in redemption and the work of the Spirit in converting and sanctifying the young church at Pentecost.

It's the day of resurrection, redemption, the Son, the work of the Spirit at Pentecost. Now, we said how Pentecost was a Jewish festival and for that reason you might think, as we say that it would fall on the last day of the week, the old Jewish Sabbath, but if you look at Leviticus 23, you see the celebration of the firstfruits and remember how it says, now is Christ risen from the dead, 1

Corinthians 15, verses 20 and 23, and become the firstfruits of them that slept, but every man in his own order, Christ the firstfruits, afterwards they are the Christ that is coming.

[19 : 03] The festival of the firstfruits is pointing us to Christ, pointing to the resurrection. What day is this Pentecost on? After the feast of the firstfruits, 50 days were numbered.

Leviticus 23, from verse 15, there we read, ye shall count unto you from the morrow after the Sabbath, that's the first day of the week, no Jewish Sabbath, first day after the Sabbath, from the day that ye brought the sheep of the wave offering, seven Sabbaths shall be complete, even unto the morrow after the seventh Sabbath, shall be number 50 days, and ye shall offer a new meat offering unto the Lord, and bring out of your habitations two loaves of two tenths deals.

So Pentecost, the original Pentecost, is always intended to be the day after the old Jewish Sabbath, first day of the week. After the firstfruits, 50 days numbered, from this the 50th day comes the name Pentecost, meaning 50 days.

What day? The first day of the week, the day after the seventh Sabbath. From the very beginning, the Lord intended these things of resurrection and redemption and the pouring out of the Spirit to be based and grounded on the first day of the week.

And when it comes to the end of all time, the visions of what shall be then were also given on this day. Revelation chapter 1, verse 10, John the Apostle says, I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day.

[20 : 30] That's when God gives this vision of all that surely can there be a more holy day as far as God is concerned. Thus, the apostolic church met on this day.

And we follow the example. Upon the first day of the week, that every one of you lay by him and so as God hath prospered, that there be no gatherings when I come. Turning again then briefly to the question of Christians, giving, that's what we just read, first day of the week.

Every one of you may buy him and store as God hath prospered in. Paul advocates a regular and discreet laying aside of monetary gifts.

In other words, week by week, setting apart rather than one big collection when he comes. One-offs taking less money.

There is a greater risk of showiness in the giving. If it's a big one-off and they leave a bigger hole in your pocket at the time of those holes and pockets of those giving.

[21 : 33] The week by week laying aside is here scripturally recommended for each one. Everyone is included. Upon the first day of the week, let every one of you lay by him and store as God hath prospered.

For each one, everyone is included. Not just the affluent and better off, but the privilege and responsibility of giving is laid upon each regardless of the circumstances, whether rich or poor, as God hath prospered him.

So the rich give more, the poor give less, but they all give and they all contribute. So how much is appropriate as God hath prospered? Well, we have looked at this subject in the past.

We've touched on it. We've looked at it in the subject of exposition, looking at the scripture. And it's the same, the same material, the same content is going to come out again. The scriptural teaching as God hath prospered is, how much should I give to be scriptural?

You've got a choice. You can either go by the Old Testament or we can go by the New. The Old Testament frequently speaks about the tithe in respect of Abraham, of the Israelites, of the Levites, of the tabernacle, and latterly in the prophets.

[22 : 48] The failure of Israel to pay their tithes is described by God as robbery. A robbery which if it is put right, he will himself bless for it.

Malachi 3, verse 8, Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes, in offerings. You're cursed with a curse, for you have robbed me.

Even this whole nation. Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it.

Malachi 3, verses 8-10. God is not mocked, and he will not be robbed, nor is God any man's debtor. When we are ready to give to the Lord that which he requires, he will pour out the blessing upon us. So that's the first piece of scripture of what's a tithe, 10%, which will have the same proportion equitably on rich and poor alike. Or, as I'm sure you know what's coming, there's the New Testament example.

[24 : 00] The rich young ruler, what did Jesus say to him? Go and sell absolutely everything you've got, give it to the poor, and you'll have treasure in heaven. Take up the cross, and follow me. Sell the lot, give the money away, and both are absolutely scriptural.

And that's what the Jerusalem church had obviously done. They had sold everything, they laid their money at the apostles' feet, they gave it all up, they all shared everything, it's great, but it runs out. But, you know, each example is equally scriptural, absolutely scriptural, you could say, it's your choice.

You can go by the one, you can go by the other, and you'd be doing what the Bible says regardless. The disadvantage of the latter view is that you can only really do it once. It's not sustainable long term.

And as we've already noticed, the church in Jerusalem did it, they sold everything, and they laid it at the apostles' feet, and before too long they ended up needing lots of help from the other churches. By Jesus' own admission, it is a counsel of perfection.

We look at Matthew 19, you know, where Jesus is speaking about this. He says in Matthew 19, at verse 21, if thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven, and come and follow me.

[25 : 17] Paul here seems to be speaking instead rather of a regular, weekly, steady, laying aside, enabling believers to give lesser amounts, but often and again.

Whatever it is we are called upon to give to the Lord, he is entitled to everything. Every day of our lives, not just one in seven.

Every last penny we have, not just our tithes. Believe it or not, that is itself sometimes used, and it's an excuse to give him nothing. Not one special holy day, no, no, because not one red cent or one penny, because if we were to be consistent, we should be giving every day and every penny, and after all, we don't want to be inconsistent.

But we are not. The Lord, in his mercy, knows that we have to live, and that living costs money. So he asks only for a time.

Do we grudge, shall we? He knows that to earn the money we must work. Six days shalt thou labour and do all thy work. The Lord, in his mercy, knows that our days are busy and precious.

[26 : 32] And of course, some people say, well, if every day belongs to the Lord, then each day is the same, so we don't make any one day special, so they end up effectively giving God nothing.

The Lord knows our needs. He knows that our days are busy and precious, so he asks only for one, only for his own day, the Lord's day. And do we grudge him that?

Let us look again with the eye of faith upon the crucified Saviour, who is himself the Lord of the Sabbath, who was given not just the time, but given everything, the cruel nails, the crown of thorns, the life ebbing from his body.

And let us consider our attitude to Christ and the cost to him of our salvation. We get it wrong so often.

But the hymn writer Isaac Watts got it right when he wrote these words. Where the whole realm of nature mine, that were an offering far too small.

[27 : 40] Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all. Thank you.