

Q&A: What is “Contribute to the needs of the saints”?

Anonymous asks: *I heard or read this a while ago now, and made a note of it as I didn't understand what it meant. It said “Contribute to the needs of the saints.” It was in some way in connection with things Christian should endeavour to achieve.*

I suspect you are alluding to a section of 2 Corinthians – chapters 8 and 9. In this section Paul is encouraging the church in Corinth to give of their finances to the offering he is taking up. This offering is for the church in Jerusalem in particular but there is a clear broader application in the attitude Christians have towards their finances etc.

At the beginning of the section, as the 1984 NIV renders it, Paul commends the Macedonian churches for their generosity and urges the Corinthians to follow their example:

*1 And now, brothers, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. 2 Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. 3 For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, 4 they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in **this service to the saints**. 5 And they did not do as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God's will. 6 So we urged Titus, since he had earlier made a beginning, to bring also to completion this act of grace on your part. 7 But just as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in your love for us—see that you also excel in this grace of giving.*

I've highlighted the key phrase, it's repeated again in the

first verse of chapter 9.

In our church we have used this passage as the basis for teaching on giving and other matters financial. This passage takes us away from legalistic obligation to “tithe” or from some sort of prosperity expectation that giving to the Lord will be returned tenfold etc. Rather the emphasis here is that generosity is simply a marker of worship and our desire to follow the way of Christ.

There is a logic behind it. People have a problem with money if they bind themselves to it – either to the having of it, evidenced by greed and stinginess; or by the perceived lack of it, evidenced by yearning and clamouring. It would be appropriate to call such attitudes idolatrous. To follow Christ is to serve him, not our idols. We therefore make a choice to let go of our idols – and when it comes to money a good way to do this is to give some of it away. That giving is an act of worship, a symbol of allegiance!

It is not meant to be legalistic. The Old Testament talks about firstfruits and 10% tithes – and there is wisdom in that as 10% is an amount that is usually impactful and representative of genuine desire, but is not overly weighty and burdensome. But it's about attitude, not rules – after all, all that we have belongs to God really.

Moreover, the giving is a blessing. A blessing to the saints, because it means that financial resources can be invested in various people and things to further the purposes of God in, with and through his people. Jesus is honoured, people are blessed, and we are demonstrate a freedom from the love of money.

All in all, it's a good thing!