

1 Corinthians 16:2 in the Navajo Bible

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T'áá Damíigo ná'ádleeh bik'eh t'áá'á'í nootínigo yáál bee nihik'idahojsdli'ígíí bik'ehgo ła' áádoosijlgo hasht'e'nidooh'ááł, áko aadi náyáago doo yáál anáádahidoohnił da. (1 Corinthians 16:2)¹

On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made. (1 Corinthians 16:2)²

Introduction

In the present context, setting something aside means holding it back, i.e., not spending it. The Navajo word *hasht'e'nidooh'ááł*, with its prefix *hasht'e'-*, has to do with preparation or with putting things in order. A free translation would be something like, "you should set something (a roundish bulky object) aside in order to prepare."

Some wish to use 1 Corinthians 16:2 to support the idea that Paul is describing a public worship service and that people were taking up an offering every Sunday when they went to church. There are a number of problems with such a model. For one thing, there wasn't any church, if what we mean by a church is the building. For another, his choice of Greek words (*thēsaurozōn*, "treasuring up," "storing up," "setting aside") indicates keeping rather than giving. When Paul arrived what was kept back would be given, it is true, but that was later. For now, people were to set some money aside, or hold it back, so they would have something to give when the time for giving should come. The ultimate purpose, of course, was so Paul would have something to take with him to Jerusalem for the poor among the churches there (see Romans 15:26).

Paul's Offering

To understand what Paul is saying in the present verse we will have to examine the words he uses. Unfortunately these are in another language, but we can learn much by examining other passages where the same words are used.

Individuals, not congregations

One of the expressions Paul uses here is the phrase, "each one of you" (Greek *hekastos humōn*). The reason why this is important is that it shows Paul is referring to individuals, and not to the congregation as a whole. He was not describing a group activity. I'd like to spend some

¹ Navajo Bible quotations are from *Diyin God Bizaad. The Holy Bible in Navajo*. Revised edition. New York: American Bible Society, 2000.

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time with this because the Navajo translation seems to give the opposite impression. To my ear, Navajo *t'ááłá'í nootínigo* ("each of you" or "all of you") emphasizes inclusiveness, while Greek *hekastos humōn* ("each of you") emphasizes individuality. Here's another verse which contains the words, "each of you" (*hekastos humōn*).

The Lord answered him, "You hypocrites! Doesn't each of you [*hekastos humōn*] on the Sabbath untie his ox or donkey from the stall and lead it out to give it water? (Luke 13:15)

In Luke 13:15 Jesus describes the actions of individuals at home on the Sabbath when their ox or donkey gets thirsty. This is not a crowd of people all untying the same donkey, or all untying multiple donkeys at the same time. Instead, each person unties his own donkey independently of what anyone else is doing.

The same phrase is used in Acts 2:38, where Peter says, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you (*hekastos humōn*), in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins." This comes closer to the Navajo idea of *t'ááłá'í nootínigo* ("all of you"). Here a number of people *are* doing the same thing at the same time and in the same place. But deciding to be baptized is a very personal thing. Even with 3000 people being baptized on the same day, what happened that day was 3000 individual baptisms, one at a time. If you had been the one lowering people into the water, you would have done that, not once, but 3000 times. Consider another example, this time from Paul.

What I mean is this: One of you [*hekastos humōn*] says, "I follow Paul"; another, "I follow Apollos"; another, "I follow Cephas"; still another, "I follow Christ." (1 Corinthians 1:12)

The phrase in Greek is identical to what we found earlier in Luke 13:15 and Acts 2:38 – in addition to the passage we started with – and it means not just one, as NIV implies, but each one. In Corinth each member of the church had his or her own opinion about who to follow. There was no agreement. Everyone was headed a different direction, as it were. Paul wanted to get the whole church focused on Christ. He wanted them to be united on this, but they weren't. That was the problem. Saying *hekastos humōn* ("each of you") in this context fits perfectly. It exactly matches the context.

By contrast, in 1 Corinthians 16:2 Paul wants each person to decide freely and without coercion how much to give for the special offering he has in mind. The words are the same in 1 Corinthians 1:12 and 16:2, but the situations are different. In chap. 1 there was no agreement, while in chap. 16 Paul wanted each person to make his or her own decision individually.

Saving back in order to give later

Paul goes on to emphasize the individual nature of his request in two other ways. Again, we'll try to understand his intent by looking at parallel passages where the same words are used.

First parallel: Luke 9:47. In 1 Corinthians 16:2 Paul uses a phrase that is also used in Luke 9:47. There we read:

Jesus, knowing their thoughts, took a little child and had him stand beside him [*par heautō*]. (Luke 9:47)

Notice the words "beside him." In this verse Jesus is not sending the child away, but bringing him close. The child's motion was toward Jesus. He stood beside Him. The same idea is present in 1 Corinthians 16:2, where Paul uses the same words (*par heautō*, "beside him") to say that each member of the church in Corinth was to set something aside at the beginning of each week. They were to keep it with them at home until the offering could be gathered and turned over to Paul when he came. There is nothing here about bringing offerings to a central location, as in a public worship service. For now the people were keeping their money at home – not spent, but not yet given either.

Another passage that uses the same words (in Greek translation) is Exodus 16:18. Here the context is one of gathering manna in the desert. When Moses was leading the Israelites out of Egypt, each person was to gather however much manna was needed.

And when they measured it by the omer, he who gathered much did not have too much, and he who gathered little did not have too little. Each one gathered [*par heautō*, here "for himself"] as much as he needed. (Exodus 16:18)

Moses was not talking about bringing the manna to some central location. Instead, the people were taking it home. In the case of Paul and the Corinthians also, the people were to keep their money at home. It would be turned over to Paul, later when he arrived.

Second parallel: Luke 12:21. Another word that deserves comment in 1 Corinthians 16:2 is the one translated "set aside" (*thēsauroizōn*, "treasuring"). We talked about this above, but consider another passage which says the same thing.

"This is how it will be with anyone who stores up [*thēsauroizōn*] things for himself but is not rich toward God." (Luke 12:21)

The context in Luke 12:21 is negative, since the kind of storing up it describes was bad. It was bad because it was selfish. What Paul has in mind is the opposite of this – not the opposite of storing things up, but the opposite of anything selfish. The Corinthians were to hold something back temporarily so they would have something to give Paul and his companions for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem. The question is not whether these Corinthians had good motives. They did. The question is whether they set their gifts aside as part of a regular weekly church service. They did not.

Discussion

If Paul is not talking about how the church should conduct its worship services, why does he mention the first day of the week? There's a good reason for this. The first day of the week, mentioned in this verse, was the first working day of the business week. Their decision about giving was not to be forced, but it was to be first – the first business decision of the week. Paul did not say how much to give. That was each individual's choice. But whatever the amount of the gift, he did not want anyone waiting until the end of the week to see if it would be convenient to give God something then, when their money had already been used for other things. They were to put God first.

The same principle is still sound today. In our case, we should set aside our tithe as soon as we get our pay check – before taking anything out to pay bills or to buy the things we need. The tithe should come out first, not last. When God's people return an honest tithe He will bless them. Trust me when I say that ninety percent with God's blessing goes much farther than 100% without it. I've seen this repeatedly and can verify that what I'm saying is true.

So far we haven't said anything about offerings. (We've talked about Paul's offering, but not about ours.) Offerings are not the same as tithe. The tithe belongs to God. It's His already. But freewill offerings are an expression of gratitude. These come, not by obligation, but from the heart. Even in the case of our offerings, however, we should give, not haphazardly, but systematically. We can plan at the outset to reserve a certain percentage of our income for God. Then when a specific need comes up, we're ready to respond to it with our funds. The offering could be say 2% of our income, over and above tithe, which is 10%. Or it could be 4%. Whatever. This is a decision you must make for yourself – just like the people in Corinth. And like them, you should do it first. Don't wait until the week is over to start thinking about this. Make a plan and follow it. If you make a plan to give, you'll soon discover that God has a plan to bless.

Conclusion

We can learn much from 1 Corinthians 16:2 about how to manage our money as Christians, but that's not my only reason for discussing this passage. The other question is not what Paul's words do imply (about giving), but what they don't imply (about worship). They don't imply that early Christian worship services took place on Sunday. On the contrary, the "first day" in this passage was not a day of worship but the first working day of the regular business week. At this early time in history, the churches – even Gentile churches – were still worshiping on the biblical Sabbath, or Saturday.

By planning their finances around the needs of God's work, the Corinthians would receive His blessing. God does not want all your money. If He did, He would have asked for it. He doesn't do this. In fact, His goal is just the opposite. He doesn't want you to have less; He wants you to have more – by not throwing it away on things like alcohol or tobacco, or entertainments that have no value, or even on things for the house that are not really needed. He asks us to place Him first so that He can place us first and make our money go farther, and do more, than it possibly could otherwise.

God is not a taker, but a Giver. By asking us to return the tithe and give offerings over and above that, He comes into our lives in a way that would not have been possible if we kept everything He gave us. In this way He brings blessings with Him that will touch every aspect of our finances. If you try this, you'll see what I mean. God can find more ways to bless you than you can find ways to ask.