

Madison Heights Christian Church
(Disciples of Christ)

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MADISON HEIGHTS MESSENGER

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Giving During Global Crisis

It is well known that the apostle Paul collected funds for the church in Jerusalem. This theme dominates a lot of his letters. It is not clear why the Jerusalem church was impoverished. It is commonly thought that the Jews in Jerusalem may have isolated Christian Jews from the economic system. They experienced hardship due to discrimination and oppression as they were cut off from friends, family, and social support. No church was a stranger to persecution at this time, but it was especially severe and long lasting in Jerusalem where poverty was one of the side effects of this persecution.

In several of his letters, the apostle Paul appeals for funds for the Jerusalem church. One of Paul's first acts of ministry was to bring the gift from the church in Antioch to Jerusalem. The context of this offering is a response to a global crisis. In Acts chapter 11 we learn that some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch and predicted that there would be a severe famine over the entire world. The disciples decided to respond by sending a relief package to the believers in Judea. This was sent to the elders by Barnabus and Paul (Acts 11:27-30). In Paul's letters we see that the apostle is caring financial assistance to help them in times of crisis. Amid the global crisis Paul presents arguments that participation in the collection is an act of charity that is a means to foster unity.

Later on Paul organized similar efforts among the churches in Macedonia and Achaia. The Corinthian letters reflect his longing to enlist them in this giving initiative. In 1st Corinthians he mentions a present crisis and in 2nd Corinthians he describes Macedonia as being under a severe trial. The context reveals that Paul was referring to the economic challenges that they were facing. When Paul appealed for help for the poor in Jerusalem he was appealing to believers that were not enjoying financial prosperity. Paul was appealing to people that were hit by a global crisis to give even in times of hardship. Christian charity is not reserved for the wealthy or the upper class, but is a concern for all Christians.

There are two significant points to learn from the apostle Paul's efforts to solicit charitable funds for the church in Jerusalem; giving without receiving recognition and giving in hard times. Charity was not something new but the type of charity that the apostle Paul advocates is different from what the people were accustomed to. Church members were accustomed to helping others in need. It was a strong biblical principal that was honored. However, funds for charity were used to assist the needy within the community and resulted in public recognition and honor. Paul's understanding was that conditions at one place have an immediate impact on other connected places. Therefore, Paul invited believers outside of Judea to give to people that they did not know and who would have no chance to reciprocate or even express thanks to them for the gift. Paul introduced the concept of interchurch solidarity by giving beyond borders.

People naturally tend to seek their own safety and benefit, and this is more prevalent during times of crisis. Paul's appeal is for us to resist this self preservation tendency and embrace global giving to the needy as a part of the Christian ideal. The collection fosters unity. It affirms our oneness of believers from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds. It bridges the gap between the poor and the rich by restoring a balance between need and surplus. A global crisis presents an opportunity for God's church to strengthen the bonds of unity. Those who have received spiritual blessings should reciprocate by sharing their material blessings.

George