

# Glad Tidings

“And we bring you good tidings of the promise made unto the fathers...” (Acts 13:32)

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## Benevolence For Saints

(Jerry Fite)

Paul writes, “. . . *this service not only filleth the measure of the wants of saints, but aboundeth also through many thanksgivings unto God; seeing that through the proving of you by this ministration they glorify God for the obedience of your confession unto the gospel of Christ, and for the liberality of your contribution unto them and unto all*” (2 Cor. 9:13).

Some have pointed to this passage to prove the contribution of the church can be used to help not only needy saints, but also “all” those who are not Christians. The passage is interpreted as the collection of the church went to help needy Christians- “unto them” and “unto all” – all of mankind.

We must first notice how the little word “all” is used in Scripture. It is limited by its context. For example, Paul says “All things are lawful unto me. . .” (I Corinthians 6:12). We know Paul is not literally saying “everything” is lawful, because of Paul’s next statement: “. . . but not all things are expedient.” This accompanying statement limits or sets the boundary for understanding “all things are lawful.” Properly understood, we know Paul is separating “expedient” things, from the realm of “lawful” things, not advocating that “everything” is lawful.”

Following the instructions of the angels, the women at the empty tomb of Jesus “returned from the tomb, and told all these things to the eleven, and to all the rest” (Luke 24:9). Do “all the rest” refer to “everyone” in Jerusalem? First, we know the apostles were chosen from the group of the Lord’s “disciples” (Luke 6:13). Second, the women “ran to bring His disciples word” (Matthew 28:7). Therefore, we rightly conclude the “apostles” (the eleven) were told, and “all the rest” of the Lord’s “disciples”, not all the rest of the general public in Jerusalem.

Like the “all things lawful” (I Cor. 6:13) and “all the rest” (Luke 24:9), the “all” of 2 Corinthians 9:13 is limited by context. Seven times (Romans 15:25, 26, 31; I Corinthians 16:1; 2 Corinthians 8:4; 9:1, 12) the Holy Spirit reveals this contribution was gathered for “the saints”.

Paul also makes it clear he wanted to avoid any mishandling of this collection and desired to do things honorable in the sight of the Lord and all men (2 Corinthians 8:20-21). Paul surely carried out the expressed purpose of the churches to help the needy saints in Jerusalem, and did not arbitrarily change the stated purpose by giving the collection to others.

In this collection, there is also emphasis placed upon the fact

Gentiles had the opportunity to help their Jewish brethren (Romans 15:27). Being “one man” in Christ was being elevated from the theoretical, to the practical. Would brethren give of their means to help brethren who were not of their cultural background? The test is on!

The collection was “*proving . . . the obedience of your confession unto the gospel of Christ*”. In return, God would receive “*many thanksgivings*.” What a wonderful picture of the oneness in the family of God!

Respecting the context, we put the pieces together. The needy saints in Jerusalem thank God for the fact His people among the Gentiles are willing to give “unto them” the Jewish Christians, and if to them, certainly “unto all” Christians who make up the family of God.

This explanation respects the fact the fact that “all” is limited by context; does no violence to the expressed purpose for the collection; places emphasis upon the importance of the new relationship between Jewish and Gentile Christians, as the gospel was spreading over the earth; and is consistent with other accounts indicating the collection from churches went to help needy saints, not the whole world.