

Romans 15:22-33: The Collection  
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IN 1940 the British Army had lost the fight against the Germans during WWII. They had been surrounded at a small town called Dunkirk in France, and were trapped. The British were certain that few of these men could be saved, and that they would have to negotiate a truce or surrender to the Germans once their army was destroyed. But the British navy, as well as nearly 1000 ships belonging to every day seamen and fishermen, crossed the English Channel and began rescuing soldiers. Ultimately almost all of the army was saved, and the British were ultimately able to defeat Germany. This is sometimes referred to as the "Miracle of Dunkirk".

In the first century a similar rescue of needy people was performed. In Acts 11:28-29 a prophecy came to the Christians in Antioch that a famine was coming. They began to raise funds for the Christians who would be most dramatically affected by this, the churches in Judea. Other churches began to raise funds as well; the church in Corinth, the church in Philippi, and ultimately in Rome. The results of this labor was the saving of these churches, and the growth of the Lord's church in general. Paul describes this effect at length in 2 Corinthians 9:6-15.

There are some basic principles in regards to the collection taken up on the first day of the week.

1. A collection is taken up on the first day of the week – 1 Corinthians 16:1-2 tell us that all churches are to take up a collection of money from church members on the first day of (every) week. Not from non-members, and not on other days.
2. This collection accomplishes church purposes – the funds that the churches use to accomplish its purposes come from this collection. The church does not engage in business or have other ways to take up a collection. It is this method alone to be used to do the work of the church.
3. We offer only what we purpose to give – the amount to be given is exclusively up to the member who gives (2 Corinthians 9:7). No one (or the whole church even) can tell another how much should be given; it is only the member who decides. There is no tithe (mandatory 10% amount) in the New Testament church.
4. The church can only aid its own – when it comes to using this collection to aid others, the only example is that of aiding members of the church. There is no authority seen to aid those outside the church with this collection (although members may aid others of their own volition).

There are also some deeper spiritual points that are part of the collection.

1. The collection invests us in the church – By our giving to the needs of our brethren (Acts 2:44-45) we become invested in their needs, and we want to see them succeed. At the same time, when we receive such aid from the church, we understand a dependency on brethren (James 5:9). We are interested in the success of the church when we have a vested interest (Acts 4:32-35).
2. The collection is a type of sacrifice – we are called to make sacrifices to God (Romans 12:1-2), and the collection can be an important sacrifice. The Old Testament teaches a great deal about sacrifices; in 1 Chronicles 21:24 David said that a sacrifice must have value. When we make the contribution, it can reflect our trust in God that He will provide the things He has promised (Matthew 6:31-34).
3. The collection is a reflection of our commitment – In Matthew 6:19-21 Jesus said that where our heart was at was where our treasure would be found. The world says "put your money where your mouth is". We reflect to the world that "this world is not our home".

Paul taught often on the collection. It is mentioned in Romans 15, 1 Corinthians 16:1-2, 2 Corinthians 8-9, Galatians 2:10, Philippians 4:15, 1 Thessalonians 2:9, 2 Thessalonians 3:8-9, 1 Timothy 5:9. This was not because of financial necessity; Paul wanted Christians to understand the spiritual significance of this collection. This is why we consider it an action involved in worship as the body of Christ.