

High Peaks Bible Fellowship

Paul's Concluding Words 1 Corinthians 16:1-24

Introduction

- In this final section of Paul's letter to the Corinthians he begins by giving instructions about his relief effort in support of the churches around Jerusalem. Paul will have more to say about this relief effort when he writes his second letter to the Corinthians in the near future (2 Cor 8-9). We know from other New Testament references that the churches in Judea were suffering economically, and Paul had previously been involved in delivering funds to Jerusalem (Acts 11:27-30).



The collection for the saints (1 Cor 16:1)

- **Now concerning the collection for the saints** = The opening words of this chapter tell us that Paul is again responding to one of the questions asked by the Corinthians (see 1 Cor 7:1, 25; 8:1; 12:1). Evidently Paul had already mentioned the charity project for the Christians in Judea, and the Corinthians wanted to know more about Paul's plans for this effort.
- **As I directed the churches of Galatia, so do you also** = Paul had already discussed this collection with the other churches in the area where he was then located. The churches of the Galatian region were south and east of the churches in Asia Minor where Paul was ministering at the time he wrote this letter. We also know from Paul's first letter to the Galatian churches that the leaders of the mother church in Jerusalem encouraged him to remember the poor (Gal 2:10), and this relief effort was an example of Paul's eagerness to do just that.

Guidelines for Christian Giving (1 Cor 16:2)

- **On the first day of every week** = This verse describes the procedure for church giving, and it tells us when the funds were to be set aside. We see that it should be done on a regular basis. The first day of the week was the day that the church gathered together, and Paul encouraged them to use the beginning of the new week as a reminder to put aside some amount of money that could be accumulated and given to others in need when the time was right.
- **Each one of you** = This shows who was supposed to participate in giving to the needs of others. "Each one" indicates that every individual with some type of income was to participate in the process. This command cuts across all socio-economic classes or distinctions. Any Christian with some form of income can participate in giving to the needs of others.
- **Put aside and save** = Here Paul tells them how the funds were to be accumulated. The Greek text literally says, "each one of you by himself set aside and save up." You can see the emphasis on the individual believer in this command. Each believer was to put aside part of his income and contribute those funds regularly to the common pool of money that would be available for the church to meet people's needs. Since Paul had mentioned the first day of the week when the church would meet, we can assume that he intended the individually collected funds were to be brought to the church on a weekly basis and contributed to the common pool.
- **As he may prosper** = Paul goes on to tell them how much money they were to set aside. The giving was to be proportional so that any individual, no matter how small his income, could participate in the project. The money saved was to be proportional to how much was made. They were to accumulate the money little by little on a regular basis so that when the time was right, they could contribute to the needs of others. Notice that no percentage is stated or required for Christian giving.
- Many believers today use the pattern of the Old Testament tithe as a requirement for giving ten percent of their income to the church, but the New Testament epistles never mandate that amount for church giving. For the nation of Israel in the Old Testament, the tithe was for the support of the tribe of Levi who maintained the

tabernacle & temple services. By contrast, New Testament Church giving is to be a free will offering out of gratefulness for what the Lord has done for us. The New Testament does not specify any amount or percentage that is required of believers. Today we are each to contribute willingly and gratefully in order to meet the needs of others out of compassion and common caring. In his second letter to the Corinthians, Paul will have much more to say about New Testament giving for today.

- **So that no collections be made when I come** = If the Corinthians would follow the procedure that Paul outlined for them, then the result would be that when the time came for actually sending the funds to the needy Christians in Judea, they could avoid scurrying around in a panic trying to collect money at the last minute.

Guidelines for Handling Church Funds (1 Cor 16:3-4)

- Paul now turns to the subject of how the final collection should be handled and delivered. It is important that church funds be handled carefully, using a good system of accountability. Notice that Paul himself was not going to receive and deliver the funds. The Corinthians themselves were to choose men that they trusted to handle and carry the money. Paul also says that letters of recommendation or letters of authority would be given to the men chosen to carry the money. This would give the entire process an official sanction -- the men would be acting as representatives for the whole church and would be exercising a special stewardship or fiduciary responsibility.
- At the end of this verse we also see the final destination for these relief funds. They were intended to relieve the poverty of the Christians in the mother church at Jerusalem. Paul had previously taken relief funds to Jerusalem (see Acts 11:27-30), and now on his third missionary journey Paul was making this a special project.
- With the phrase "if it is fitting" Paul implies that he may or may not be required to go with the funds. This is a Greek third class conditional sentence, indicating only that there is a possibility it could be fulfilled. Paul leaves the matter undecided, but somewhat likely, that he would travel with the relief funds.

Paul's Travel Plans (1 Cor 16:5-9)

- Here Paul gives an indication of his travel plans. He has decided not to travel to Corinth immediately, but he is planning to wait until after he has visited the churches of Macedonia. Notice that Paul intends to "go through" the region of Macedonia. He does not plan to stay there, like he plans to do with the Corinthians. He even hopes that he can spend the winter months in Corinth. He wants to have an extended time with them, to devote more time and attention to their needs. This letter has been his way of helping them with their difficulties even though he is managing the situation remotely, but he knows that is no substitute for being there in person to deal with the issues in the Corinthian church. In the last phrase of this verse, Paul seems to be somewhat uncertain of his plans after his stay in Corinth. But wherever the Lord leads him, he is hoping that the Corinthians will assist him in fulfilling that purpose.
- In verse seven Paul takes the time to make sure they understand he does not intend to simply pass through Corinth, but he definitely wants to remain with them for as long a time as the Lord will allow. It is clear from verse eight that Paul was writing from Ephesus and that this letter to the Corinthians was written in the spring sometime before Pentecost. According to his previous statements, he was intending to pass through the Macedonian churches during the summer of that year, so that he could spend the fall and winter in Corinth.
- In verse nine Paul tells the Corinthians why he is remaining in Ephesus, and it has to do with both positive and negative factors. On the positive side, Paul had recently seen some type of great opportunity for fruitful ministry there. The word for "effective service" is the Greek term *energes* which could be translated simply as "activity" but it also implies the effective outpouring of energy. Something was happening in Ephesus that led Paul to believe there was a rich harvest to be worked.
- On the negative side, Paul saw that there was quite a bit of opposition to his ministry in Ephesus and he took this as a validation of his efforts. Sometimes you only know how much good you are doing for the Lord when you see how powerfully God's enemies are trying to oppose it. Paul had already alluded to these struggles when he mentioned that he "fought with wild beasts at Ephesus" (1 Cor 15:32).

Timothy's Travel Plans (1 Cor 16:10-11)

- Now Paul mentions Timothy's travel plans, because it is likely that the Corinthians will see Timothy before they see Paul. Remember that Timothy and Erastus had been sent into Macedonia before Paul wrote this letter to Corinth (Acts 19:22), and it was possible that they would travel down to Corinth after their work in Macedonia was complete. Paul wants to be sure that Timothy is not mistreated by the factions in Corinth. He does not want

them to give Timothy any cause to be afraid, and evidently Paul had a good reason for thinking there might be trouble for Timothy (1 Cor 4:17-19). So here, he commands them not to give Timothy any grief while he fulfills his ministry obligations among them.

- Apparently some of the Corinthians had demonstrated an arrogance which resulted in spiteful behavior toward Paul and his representatives. Here Paul commands them to send Timothy on his way in peace. Paul says that he is waiting for Timothy and his traveling companions, and he expects him to arrive without any trouble from the Corinthians.

Apollo's Travel Plans (1 Cor 16:12)

- Paul now discussed the travel plans of Apollos. This verse begins with the phrase "Now concerning" and it implies that the letter from the Corinthians had asked that Apollos be sent to them. Evidently Apollos had been in Ephesus with Paul around the time he was writing to them, and Paul had encouraged Apollos to return to Corinth. But for some reason Apollos chose not return immediately. Some commentators think Apollos left Corinth in disgust over the dissension there, some of which involved their admiration of his speaking gifts.
- The phrase "it was not at all *his* desire" implies that Apollos refused to return, but notice that the word "*his*" (italics) is not in the original text. We could also translate this, "It was not the Lord's will for him to come now." Whatever the reason, it is clear that the time was not right for either Paul or Apollos to return to Corinth. Both of them would eventually go back to Corinth, but they were following the Lord's timetable rather than their own. This passage helps us to understand that just because there is an immediate need, that does not mean you must immediately attend to it. As someone once said, "The need does not always constitute the call." Timing is important, and the Lord's timing is everything.

Summary of the Letter's Teaching (1 Cor 16:13-14)

- Literally Paul says, "Stay awake." Evidently their tendency was to be spiritually asleep. Next Paul says, "Stand still" or "Stand firmly in place." Evidently they were about to fall down or totter wildly back and forth. Paul tells them to remain firmly rooted in the faith. This is Paul's way of telling them to remain true to the doctrinal truths of the faith. They are to take their stand on the doctrines of Christianity, and not to fall prey to the unstable ideas that were being presented to them by the false teachers and philosophers of their culture. Then Paul commands them to conduct themselves like mature men -- they are to increase in strength in their walk of faith.
- Finally, Paul reminded them of the important truth that Christian love should guide all that is said and done. We could read all of chapter thirteen back into this one short sentence. Those truths are so important that here Paul simply commands them to follow the way of Christian love.

Commending Stephanus, Fortunatus, & Achaicus (1 Cor 16:15-18)

- Before Paul closes his letter to the Corinthians, he wants to be sure he commends the leadership of Stephanas and his companions. He emphasizes the important role that Stephanas has taken in the Corinthian church. Not only were Stephanas and his household Paul's first converts in the province of Achaia, but they immediately took on a leadership role in the church there.
- In light of this, here is what Paul wants the Corinthians to do about it: he wants them to recognize and submit to leaders such as these. Instead of having factions and rifts within the church, believers are to stand solidly behind leaders who are teaching the truths of the Word of God. Stephanas and his household were not the only ones in the Corinthian church whose leadership should be valued and respected. The Corinthians were to demonstrate a similar attitude toward all of the people who were truly contributing to the ministry of the church.
- The news from Corinth which was brought by Stephanas, Fortunatus, & Achaicus made Paul extremely joyful. Their coming filled an empty spot in his experience of them. The letter and fellowship they supplied must have been extremely important to Paul as he was laboring in a distant region. He describes their influence as being a refreshing of his spirit, just as they had refreshed the Corinthians' spirits while they were ministering to them. Paul ends his commendations for them by repeating his command that the Corinthian church was to acknowledge such men. This meant to recognize them in a somewhat official manner, to set a mark of recognition upon them, to know them well and follow their example.

Greetings from Asia Minor (1 Cor 16:19-21)

- Paul was ministering in Ephesus at the time he was writing to Corinth, and we know that his influence from

Ephesus had an impact on the entire region (Acts 19:10). From this verse we see that many churches were established in that region as a result of Paul's ministry there. The Corinthians' friends Aquila and Priscilla had previously traveled to Ephesus to help Paul in his work there, and they sent their personal greetings back to Corinth. One of the church gatherings in Ephesus was meeting in their home.

- Verse twenty tells us that all the believers with whom Paul was ministering in Ephesus were very concerned about the church in Corinth. All of them had an intense interest in what was going on in one of their sister churches in the province across the sea. Paul tells them to greet each other with a holy kiss. This was a customary greeting showing love and respect to the other person, with men greeting men & women greeting women in this way. It was probably similar to the greeting custom still maintained in many European countries today.
- Literally verse twenty-one says, "With the hand of me, Paul." Even though Paul dictated his letters to a recording secretary, he took the pen and signed his name at the end of the letter. This was his common custom, as we see from 2 Thess 3:17.

Final Exhortations (1 Cor 16:22-24)

- Paul ended the letter with a very solemn truth: "If anyone does not love the Lord, he is to be accursed." A person cannot truly love the Lord without understanding who He is and trusting only in what He has done in order to have eternal life with Him. Anyone who does not love the Lord in this sense will truly be cut off or accursed for all eternity. And the final word (Maranatha = "the Lord comes") would be like saying, "The Lord will make this happen soon."
- As was Paul's custom in all his letters, he closed with the strongest desire for God's grace to powerfully work in their lives. Grace is usually defined as the unmerited favor of God in our lives, but someone once operationalized the definition of grace by saying that it is the God-given desire and power to do what God wants us to do. In this sense, grace is an active force in the life of a believer.
- Paul's final words to those misbehaving Corinthians was that he loved them deeply. Even though he had said some very strong things and rebuked them severely at times, all that was said was given out of his deep love for them. It was Paul's love "in Christ Jesus" which was expressed to all those who also loved the Lord. What an amazing motive for an amazing letter!

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