

A Study of First Corinthians

Week Fifteen

1 Corinthians 16:1-24

Day One

16:1 Now about the collection for God's people: Do what I told the Galatian churches to do. 2 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. 3 Then, when I arrive, I will give letters of introduction to the men you approve and send them with your gift to Jerusalem. 4 If it seems advisable for me to go also, they will accompany me.

v. 1 – We will examine the special collection that Paul mentioned here in our study of 2 Corinthians. This was a project that Paul saw as a practical expression of the truth he was teaching: The body of Christ is one. So he encouraged Gentile believers to give money for famine relief in Palestine, for people that had never met, to a culture that did not particularly care for Gentiles. Paul wasn't even sure if the Jewish believers would receive the money from Gentiles, but he spent a great deal of time working on this offering project.

We see here that he also instructed the Galatian churches to participate as well. Paul was a good pastor and wanted to seize this opportunity to instruct the Gentiles on the realities of what it means to be part of Christ's body. We take this truth for granted today, but it was radical in Paul's day, for the Jews, even some Jewish believers, saw themselves as the exclusive agents for and owners of the one true God. Now they had to make room for the fact that God had opened the door for Gentiles to be part of that family as well.

v. 2 – This is an indication that the Gentiles churches were meeting on Sunday, the first day of the week. Paul did not want this collection taken while he was there. Perhaps he did not want people to give just because he was the one asking them in person, but rather because they felt like God wanted them to give. Wow! Some modern pastors could certainly learn from this verse! I have seen such manipulation around offerings, and often there are some who are more “gifted” than others in “lifting” an offering. So they are the ones asked to take it.

Paul wanted this offering to be regular, systematic, and consistent with every person's income—and free from any pressure except that which comes from doing God's will. He allowed the local leaders to carry out the work under his direction. He set no quota, nor did he put pressure on them to give more than another church or region. He just wanted them to respond as the Spirit and their heart led them.

v. 3 – Paul didn't want to be responsible for this collection, so he set out the plan for when he arrived. The church would choose representatives to take the offering to Jerusalem and he would write letters of recommendation and explanation. This was

another “gamble,” for what if the Jerusalem church refused to receive those Gentile emissaries with the collection? Paul knew it was worth the risk, for both Jew and Gentile churches had to know and express practically the truth of the unity in Christ’s church.

v. 4 – Paul was not insisting that he accompany the offering, but of course he did. I am impressed with Paul’s thorough and consistent strategy that was free of all pressure and control. Of course, he was encouraging them to be generous, which is a godly trait. **Are you generous? Do you give amounts consistent with your income? Do you see needs in the lives of people and try to meet them?**

Day Two

5 After I go through Macedonia, I will come to you — for I will be going through Macedonia. 6 Perhaps I will stay with you awhile, or even spend the winter, so that you can help me on my journey, wherever I go.

v. 5 – I’m not sure why Paul would repeat that he would be going through Macedonia. Perhaps he had promised to come previously but had to change his plans (we will see this more clearly when we study 2 Corinthians). This time he was saying, “I really mean it!” Macedonia is of course where Philippi, Thessalonica and Berea were located and was the scene for some of Paul’s most significant ministry. We know that Philippi was in many ways his favorite church, so he would have every reason to want and visit there. So he would enjoy going there and could tack on a visit to Corinth at the same time.

What do you enjoy doing? Why don’t you do more of it? What are you afraid of?

v. 6 – It seems that Paul was thinking out loud here, which is probably what got him into trouble with the Corinthians, so to speak. Some may have interpreted this kind of talk to mean that he was definitely coming to visit. When he could not, they accused him of waffling—making commitments and then breaking them. We all must be careful of the promises we make and the things we say, especially if we are leaders.

Also Paul wanted to minister to them and have them minister to him, so that they could assist him in other ministry. We should never only be interested in what we can *receive* in ministry, but what also we can *give*. **Is there anyone you can assist now to do what God wants them to do?** I have a number of people who help me when I go to Africa. I can’t tell what it means to receive a check, encouragement or other practical help when I am doing God’s will. It is like a cool water on a hot day. **Who can you help now? What can you do to encourage someone else, especially someone who has ministered to you in a significant way?**

Day Three

7 I do not want to see you now and make only a passing visit; I hope to spend some time with you, if the Lord permits. 8 But I will stay on at Ephesus until Pentecost, 9 because a great door for effective work has opened to me, and there are many who oppose me.

v. 7 – It sounds like Paul could have made a quick stop in Corinth, but he wanted to make a longer visit where there could be time to make an impact. Notice what he wrote, “If the Lord permits.” That is what it’s all about. What God will enable you and me to do. It isn’t about what we wish to do, or hope to do. It’s about what **He** wants us to do. So we must be somewhat cautious as we make plans, saying:

Now listen, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money." Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. Instead, you ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that." As it is, you boast and brag. All such boasting is evil (James 4:13-16).

Yet we must not be afraid of pursuing our interests, the desires of our heart, for God put them there. I know many people who are so passive in pursuing God’s will that they never seem to do God’s will. Remember also what the Bible teaches:

Delight yourself in the LORD and he will give you the desires of your heart (Psalm 37:4).

So God puts the desires there and then helps you fulfill them. Yet you must put your trust in Him for the entire process. **Does this make sense?** If not, that’s not bad a thing at all. You should have some questions about what you do, trusting that God is in them, but making room for the fact that you may be wrong. **Can you live with this tension, with this seeming contradiction?** If you can, then you will be alright as you seek to do God’s will.

vs. 8&9 – It seems that Paul was in Ephesus when he wrote this letter and something significant was going on there. God had opened a door of significant ministry for him. When God opens a door, no man can close it. When He closes a door, no man can open it. But along with the door came opposition. It is easy to interpret opposition to mean that you are doing something *wrong*, but often it appears to prove and confirm that you are doing something *right*.

Where is the greatest opposition in your life right now? Is it hiding or blocking a door of opportunity? Furthermore, don’t just expect the opposition to be external. Where is your greatest internal opposition? Where do you battle fear, low self-esteem or rejection, causing you to procrastinate or flee? Paul was going to stay on until Pentecost, however long that was, in spite of the opponents. You and I need to do the same.

Day Four

10 If Timothy comes, see to it that he has nothing to fear while he is with you, for he is carrying on the work of the Lord, just as I am. 11 No one, then, should refuse to accept him. Send him on his way in peace so that he may return to me. I am expecting him along with the brothers. 12 Now about our brother Apollos: I strongly urged him to go to you

with the brothers. He was quite unwilling to go now, but he will go when he has the opportunity.

v. 10 – I wonder if Paul was asking them to protect Timothy from the Paul’s opponents in Corinth, or at least the factional arguments that had divided the Corinthian church. Paul wasn’t shy to declare that his team and he were carrying out the work of the Lord. There was no self-doubt. **Do you have that confidence that what you are doing is the work of the Lord? If not, why not? Perhaps if you can’t say that, then you aren’t doing the work that God wants you to do? If that’s true, what work do you think God would want you to do? How can you do more of it?**

v. 11 – Ah, now we see that Paul was indeed concerned that some in the church would not accept Timothy because he was Paul’s representative. It was and is the church’s responsibility and duty to take care of God’s servants who do His will as they travel and minister:

Dear friend, you are faithful in what you are doing for the brothers, even though they are strangers to you. They have told the church about your love. You will do well to send them on their way in a manner worthy of God. It was for the sake of the Name that they went out, receiving no help from the pagans. We ought therefore to show hospitality to such men so that we may work together for the truth (3 John 5-8).

This does not mean that God’s servants must be put into sumptuous hotels and treated like visiting heads of state. It does mean that they must have their basic needs reasonably met in a way that will help and not hinder the work that God has sent them to do. **What do you do to help God’s servants carry out their work? What more can you do?**

v. 12 – Paul was always on the lookout for people who could help build the churches. He had a team that he sent to continue the work that God wanted him to do. Yet notice that Apollos had his own work to do and was “quite unwilling” to follow Paul’s suggestion to minister in Corinth at that time. I love that picture of those two men working together. On the one hand, Paul suggested in hope that Apollos would go. Apollos, on the other hand, resisting for whatever reasons, staying focused on what he was doing.

Yet there was no animosity on Paul’s part. He had appealed to Apollos but then Paul trusted the Lord for the outcome. I wish more of God’s servants would follow this model: cooperation, disagreement, peace, no pressure tactics, with an ultimate view that the church, and not their personal ministries, be blessed.

Paul was a fabulous leader. I have stated that on many occasions. He was strong, but he was godly. He was a leader, but functioned in a team. He had authority, but didn’t use it unless he had to. He had rights, but he did not always exercise them, choosing to inconvenience himself rather than the saints. I love this man. He is worthy of imitation.

Day Five

13 Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be men of courage; be strong. 14 Do everything in love. 15 You know that the household of Stephanas were the first converts in Achaia, and they have devoted themselves to the service of the saints. I urge you, brothers, 16 to submit to such as these and to everyone who joins in the work, and labors at it.

v. 13 – Be on guard, stand firm, have courage, be strong. Those are all commands and we would do well to obey today. If you are going to be a person of purpose and do God's will, you will have to do and be all those things at one time or another. As I wrote earlier in this study, courage isn't the absence of fear. It's action in spite of fear.

We must be vigilant and, when opposition and attack comes, we must stand firm. Perhaps these other passages will encourage you to be more diligent.

If you falter in times of trouble, how small is your strength! (Proverbs 24:10).

‘If you have raced with men on foot and they have worn you out, how can you compete with horses? If you stumble in safe country, how will you manage in the thickets by the Jordan?’ (Jeremiah 12:5).

Why do you say, O Jacob, and complain, O Israel, "My way is hidden from the LORD; my cause is disregarded by my God"? Do you not know? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom. He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint (Isaiah 40:27-31).

v. 14 – That just about sums it up. Remember 1 Corinthians 13? Paul knew that love could cure their ills of bickering, dis-unity and bad behavior.

vs. 15&16 – Paul was trying to establish an atmosphere and attitude of honor for those who were doing God's work. I think many have gone too far today in trying to establish this culture of honor, and, of course, there are still many who treat their spiritual leaders with indifference or worse. Where is the balance? I think if we keep in mind how important our spiritual leaders are, we will do the right things and have the right attitude where they are concerned. I honor my pastor for the years he has served our church. I don't reverence him, but I pray for him, speak well of him and make my gifts available to him as he would want to use them. If he asks me to do or consider something, I take it very seriously

How do you treat your spiritual leaders? What is your attitude toward them? Worship or disdain? Indifference or adulation? Both extremes are wrong, so I urge you to find a balance that worships God for the gifts He has put in our midst to serve our spiritual needs.

Day Six

17 I was glad when Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus arrived, because they have supplied what was lacking from you. 18 For they refreshed my spirit and yours also. Such men deserve recognition. 19 The churches in the province of Asia send you greetings. Aquila and Priscilla greet you warmly in the Lord, and so does the church that meets at their house.

vs. 17&18 – These three men were from Corinth and came to visit Paul. This was how he got the information and probably the letter from Corinth that was the basis for him writing his own letter that we have been studying. Notice how “fluid” the early church was. People were traveling here and there doing the work of God. The same is true today. I travel a great deal and I meet many others who are doing the same as they pursue the will of God. My only problem is how many pastors travel, abandoning their churches for long periods of time, so that they can minister outside the local church.

My thinking is that these men should either travel or pastor, but not do both. Too often the travel is a source of income, sort of like a second job. I think this is a disservice to the local church who is paying them to pastor. I worked for a man who would at times travel all night Saturday to be home to preach on Sunday. He would then every now and then leave again Sunday afternoon to speak someplace else—and he was the pastor of the local church where I was employed! That is just plain wrong, in my opinion.

v. 19 – Paul was in Ephesus with Priscilla and Aquila, his fellow tent makers and workers in the Lord. They had a church in their home. There are many today who have house churches but I don’t think we can replicate what the early church did in this matter. I think house churches today are quite limited and limiting. I firmly believe in small groups meeting in homes, but I don’t think we should pursue a house church strategy today unless there are few or no other options. That is my opinion. I think the body ministry, worship and missions outreach of house churches is limited or non existent, thus severely hampering the work those house churches can do. That is my opinion. What’s yours?

Day Seven

20 All the brothers here send you greetings. Greet one another with a holy kiss. 21 I, Paul, write this greeting in my own hand. 22 If anyone does not love the Lord — a curse be on him. Come, O Lord! 23 The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you. 24 My love to all of you in Christ Jesus. Amen.

v. 20 – Paul sent greetings from all the churches in Asia (this was a province and not what we know to be Asia today) and from all the brothers and leaders. He wanted the Corinthians to feel that they truly were part of a much larger movement—the body of Christ! He was trying to engender love not just for their local body but for every local body who called on the name of the Lord.

There is an old song that said, “And they’ll know we are Christians by our love, by our love. Yes, they’ll know we are Christians by our love.” Not our doctrine, not our spiritual gifts, but our love. And Paul urged that this love not be secret but real and public. Thus he asked them to greet one another with a kiss.

How do you express your love for God’s children, your brothers and sisters? Do you see them as family, even if they don’t look like you or go to another church with differing doctrines?

v. 21 – It was common for someone like Paul to dictate his letters to a scribe who took down what he said. I always found dictation harder than writing, for I couldn’t always keep a flow of what I wanted to say. The fact that Paul probably did dictate only increases my admiration for what he said, “wrote,” and did.

To end the letter, Paul took a pen and put his personal mark on it. He wanted them to know that this letter was indeed from him. This showed how intimate Paul was with his churches. He knew that they would recognize his handwriting! They would look at this and say, “Yep, that’s Paul alright. I would know that handwriting anywhere!”

How closely do you work with the people to whom God has joined you? Do they know you? Do you know them? Would you recognize certain things that they do as being distinctive to them and their work?

v. 22 – Paul took the pen and invoked a powerful curse. Paul put a curse on anyone who didn’t love Jesus! If they didn’t love Jesus, they would not love His church—so in some sense Paul put a curse on anyone who didn’t love the church in Corinth. He was undoubtedly cursing the enemies of the Church, which would include his fellow Jews who were unbelievers who opposed his work there or anywhere. This is pretty strong stuff! Perhaps Paul remembered the maxim that Jesus spoke:

“He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters. And so I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come” (Matthew 12:30-32).

Those who opposed the church were indicating that they didn’t think that the Holy Spirit was involved. That was and is blasphemy—attributing the work of God to someone or something else. So Paul invoked a curse on anyone who opposed the work of God. That seems harsh but is appropriate, for this isn’t about building a company or a club, but the body of Christ. In other words, it is serious business for which Jesus gave His life. Anyone who would oppose what Jesus did is not a friend of God, no matter how nice or righteous they appear.

vs. 23&24 – Paul prayed a blessing on them after he pronounces a curse on their enemies. What did he bless them with? It was a prayer for God’s grace to be with them. Paul knew that love had to be their motive for action and that God’s grace had to sustain them as they acted. As we finish the study of this letter, I pray for God’s grace to be with you as well. And, as Paul, I declare my love for you and all students of God’s word everywhere. Thank you for participating in this study and I hope you will join me as we begin our study of Paul’s second letter to the Corinthians. Amen.