

1 Corinthians 16

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[0 : 00] ancient letter that has a word for us today. The ancient text, the age of it does not mean that it is irrelevant. It is God's word and thus relevant for you and me today. Let me pray and we'll get started. Father, thank you for this time in your presence with your people, and we commend it to you in Christ's name. Amen. 1 Corinthians 16. While the main substance of the letter is now complete, when we come to this particular chapter still, in the great apostle's mind, there are concerns that need to be addressed, plans to be shared, greetings to be exchanged, there's an authentication of the letter that needs to be given. And so the letter continued, but not for long. It's almost over. If you noticed, as we have gone through the book, there is a particular introductory phrase now concerning. We've seen that, haven't we? We've seen that in chapter 7, verse 1. We've seen it, verse 25 of chapter 7. We've seen it, chapter 8, verse 1, chapter 12, verse 1. This marks Paul's engagement with concerns that have come to him by way of whoever a messenger might have been from the Corinthians. If you notice in our text, two more appear in our text today.

Look at chapter 16, verse 1. There it is. Now concerning. Now concerning the collection for the saints. We see that, verse 1. Notice also in verse 12. Now concerning our brother Apollos. Huh? What about the collection, Paul? Well, he's going to get to that. What about Apollos? Huh? He's going to address that too.

With these two things in mind, there are three headers that really help us to wrap up the letter on this evening. Paul's collection and travel plans, verses 1 through 9. Paul's colleagues and Paul's challenge in verses 10 through 18. And then we find Paul's closing remarks in verses 19 through 21.

Gives direction for the collection, huh? There was a gospel initiative to assist needy believers in Jerusalem. That was underway. It seems like not only had the Corinthians been invited into this, if we look and see, but we look and see. He'd also directed the churches of Galatia in a similar kind of way.

Whereby these who had received, you might say, have sort of tapped into the Jewish or covenantal heritage and had shared spiritual things, they were to share their material things with the poor saints who were of Jewish heritage in that day. And they were to share their material things with the Christian and the Christian. And they were to share their material things with the Christian. And they were to Paul's instructions that we find here are very simple and clear and made up what could be called the Corinthian collection plan. It was to be intentional, thoughtful, planned ahead of time, and in a card with one's prosperity. Thus, when Paul arrived after a bit of administrative tweaking, they or he or someone that he would designate would be sent on their way with this particular designating, designated offering.

[4 : 04] You can see those particular things in here. We don't have time to get into the weeds tonight because we do want to cover the chapter. But this is really instructive for you and me today. After matters of gospel teaching and gospel living have been dealt with, don't forget the collection.

Business is not complete until we deal with matters as it relates to supporting the work of the gospel. Here was a local church giving plan.

But notice that it went beyond the local church. They were to help those in need in another geographic area. These were outside of those within the local body of believers.

So then, whether the goal for the local church might be maintenance or mission, or as in this particular case, mercy, it's good for local churches to have a plan whereby each person can participate in it as the Lord prospers him or her. And the question that I would ask you on this evening, are you intentionally and thoughtfully and regularly engaging in what the Lord is doing in and through the local church, whether it is mission, or maintenance of the work locally, or as it concerns mercy?

Are you engaged in those kind of ways? Not in Corinth, but here in Chicago. If not, friends, you and I should be.

[5 : 49] Here are instructions concerning the collection. In essence, he's saying collections are important. Plan for them. Participate in them. Don't collect them.

Don't forget to share, people of God. Verses 2 and 3 note Paul's intentions to come to Corinth. Notice what he says there. When I come. When I arrive. I will visit you. Travel and his plans and in the process of possibly staying with them in Corinth for a spell.

And allowing them to help him on his way, to help him on his journey, probably involves some kind of engagement in supporting him in some kind of way as he was going on, coming to them, but was also going on beyond them.

Look at verse 7. I love this. Because Paul not only needed their support, he needed their company. He desired their company. I do not want to see you just in passing.

I hope to spend some time with you, if the Lord permit. Look at verse 9. Paul mentions two very present realities for him.

[7 : 20] Number one, there was opportunity for gospel work, but also there was opposition to gospel work. Two very present realities. Think about it.

Gospel opportunities, but not simply gospel opportunities. Gospel opposition. Wide open doors on the one hand, but opposing forces on the other.

Are we such that we are discerning enough to see both of those? Opportunities. And it's not simply enough to see one without seeing the other. Opportunities. Where are the opportunities for you?

What doors might there be open for you? And I'm afraid that if you're like me, you don't look for those opportunities enough.

Sometimes the opportunities are so big that, you know, a running back can get through them without the help of the offensive line. If we just look for where those opportunities might be.

[8 : 26] But on the other hand, there's also opposition. And we need to be wise and discerning as to where that opposition might be. Paul was aware of both.

But still, he pressed on. Paul's collection and travel plans were followed by the mention. Notice of Paul's colleagues and Paul's challenge in verses 10 through 18.

Colleague number one. We know of him, don't we? Timothy comes into view in verse 10. When Timothy comes, see that you put him at ease among you.

Why? He's doing the work of the Lord just as I am. So let no one despise him. Help him on his way in peace that he may return to me for I'm expecting him with the brothers.

Long time associate and ministry colleague, son of the in the faith, Timothy. What a faithful servant of God.

[9 : 30] Elsewhere, Paul speaks of him in very lofty terms. He said, look here, I don't have anyone like Timothy who will care for your welfare. He's one of a kind.

He's a unique kind of person. He gets here apostolic endorsement, apostolic approval. And the Corinthians are encouraged to help him on his way. But then there's another person that comes in view also.

There he is. There's our man, Apollos, concerning our brother Apollos. He comes into the picture in verse 12. Remember him? He is this dynamic preacher, orator, and popular preacher who followed Paul to Corinth.

You remember the word earlier in the book. I planted. Apollos watered. But ultimately, it was God who gave the increase.

Paul had planted chapter 18 of Acts. Apollos comes in and waters chapter 19 of Acts. Each of these human instruments had been used of God.

[10 : 38] They played their role in the development of the Corinthian believers. But for unstated reasons, we see here, it was not Apollos' desire to come to Corinth at that time.

We can only speculate as to reasons why he may not have come. Was he aware that people in Corinth were really doting on him in an unhealthy way?

And that he chose to distance himself from those kinds of things? Perhaps that was it. Paul, in spite of his urging, had not persuaded him to come. Hey, Corinthians, Timothy's coming.

Apollos is not coming at this time. For whatever reason, it seems like, out of the blue, in verses 13 and 14, Paul utters a series of commands, five to be exact.

Did Paul's mention of Apollos and his plan, that is, Apollos' plan not to come, prompt what we see in these verses? In other words, whether Apollos comes or not, this is what you need to be doing, Corinthians, huh?

[11 : 48] The truth is that these two verses reinforce the essential teaching that has been passed on in this letter. I mean, it is as if Paul is returning to some of the words that he had said earlier in the book.

They are to be watchful, and I'll help you to see it as we walk through this, but notice the first thing that they were supposed to do. They were to be alert, watchful.

This is the word that we get the name Gregory from, Gregory, to be alert, to be watchful here, that their beliefs, and here it was, that their beliefs and behaviors were in a card with the gospel.

They were to be on guard in the midst of a culture that was plagued by both idolatry and immorality, not to succumb to such forces in that particular culture.

It was there that they were to take root and grow and to be effective in living and in their witness for Christ. Well, think about a word like that coming, not simply in Carwood, but in Chicago.

[13 : 00] And not simply in Chicago, but on the campus of the University of Chicago. Be watchful. Be alert that what you believe and how you behave are in a card with gospel truth.

It was there that they were to grow and to be effective in living and in witness. Well, just think about that can happen, friends, regardless of where we live, regardless of where our feet are planted or the address of where we live.

We can be effective in gospel witness in our world. To do that demands your watchfulness in mind. But notice what he says. The call to stand firm in the faith here was a call to correct beliefs.

They were to be well grounded in Christian beliefs as the power of the cross, chapter 1, as in the reality of the resurrection, chapter 15.

They are to stand grounded in those truths that we confess this morning and will confess even on this evening, as far as the pocket or the package of Christian truth that has been believed down through the centuries.

[14 : 18] I believe in God the Father. I believe in God the Son. I believe in God the Holy Spirit. And of course, we expand that. But they are to stand. It's a call to correct doctrine.

And notice what else they would do. And here it is right here. They were to act like men. This is especially meaningful because you may recall that one of the challenges of the letter was for them to grow up.

That they were to not behave as babes. That they were not to be as children. That they would grow up and be mature. As we would say today, they were to man up, if you will.

He tells them to be strong, not weak. They were to be the strong ones in the midst of the weakness of others. Chapter 8 and 9. There was a sense in which they were to be soldiers because these four words are actually military words.

They were to be tough and manly and mature. Several years ago, my daughter gave me the Godfather trilogy as a Christmas gift.

[15 : 25] I don't know if you have any Godfather fans, but I love it. I love it. Number one, horror. Don Corleone in his office.

And Johnny Fontaine comes in. And Johnny's a little limp wrist, if you will. And he comes complaining to the Godfather.

And the Godfather just about grabs him in the neck. And he rebukes him. Basically, he says, be a man, be a man, be a man. Man up, if you will.

Act like men. Be strong. Did you hear the echo of that in Joshua 1 that was read on this evening? Be strong and of good courage because all the territory that's before you, the Lord God, your God's going to give it to you.

Be strong, not weak. Strong in the midst of the weakness of others. But notice, Paul takes a turn in verse 14. Again, in somewhat staccato-like fashion, he gives those military words in verse 13.

[16 : 34] But then, so it turns a corner. Brings up things from another angle. Huh? They are to be to love. You see that? Notice what it says. Let all that you do, everything that you do, be done in love.

Huh? Paul calls the Corinthians. Here it is. Remember 1 Corinthians chapter 13? He's done so previously. He's called them to love. But here he does.

In closing, he does it again. Why does he do this? Because love is the mark of discipleship. Love is the mark of maturity. To be without love, friends, is to be without the distinguishing mark of the Christian faith.

Huh? Tells them that. Oh, boy, then he shifts back. Notice, I love verse 15 and following. It says, I urge you, brothers, you know the household of Stephanas.

They're the first converts in Achaia. And that they have devoted themselves. I love what King James says. He puts it. They've addicted themselves to the ministry to the saints.

[17 : 35] They've really given themselves over to serving God's people. Huh? They may not be big names. You may not know their names outside Corinth. Oh, but these folks are the real deal.

And they're serving. Huh? He turns his attention to another group of his colleagues. These were, you might even say, the home team folks. The household of Stephanas had been mentioned in chapter 1.

Paul says he had baptized them. Chapter 1, verse 16. But notice what he says about them. In essence, he said, these are selfless saints. They're devoted to the service of the saints.

Well, Timothy and Titus, these are outside guys. Huh? Ah, but here's the home team. They are servants and fellow workers and they're laborers. And they were a breath of fresh air to both Paul and to other people.

Know anybody like that? I was, been in email communication with some friends from a former church. Husband just has had back surgery and he was communicating in his email about the wife and is having her own set of challenges.

[18 : 42] But when I think about this particular couple, boy, they have given themselves. I mean, this one friend, he's been chairman of the elder board.

This, the wife and the couple just giving herself again and again to hospitality kind of efforts. Huh? What a testimony. But then, you know what?

I drove up to Ray School this morning around about a little before nine o'clock or so. And I saw a set of cars and I knew whose cars those were.

I recognized the makes and the models and I knew the people who drove them there. They were there. Not only that, they're there every Sunday. They're there before you and I get there.

They're there setting up. They're there because they devoted themselves to the saints. And they come and we come in and things are set up or things are in place or in the process of being there.

[19 : 41] Because it's people like that. And Paul said, you need to recognize these kind of people. These serving kinds of people. Don't forget to recognize those who serve.

What a word for us. So he's giving them reminders about sharing and standing and serving. And then he moves into his closing words, doesn't he? Just what did Paul's closing words include?

Notice in verses 19 and 20, there are words of greeting. Pretty typical, not simply for Paul and his letters, but the letters of that day.

Churches of Asia send you greetings, Aquila and Prisca, together with the church in their house. Typical of his, he giving certain greetings from certain ones.

Basically, he said, so-and-so said hi. And other person, they said hi too. They wanted me to tell you hello for them. Again, that's in essence what you have here.

[20 : 45] People like Prisca and Aquila and those in their house church, they're sending greetings, unnamed people in verses 19 and 20. But then after, so there's a word of greeting in 19 and 20, but there's this word of authentication in verse 21.

It's sort of like this. He takes the pen momentarily from the scribe that he's been dictating this letter to. Sort of puts his Pauline signature there, just to authenticate it.

He pins the greeting himself at this particular point. Not only that, there is a word, a warning to the rebellious. Boy, I don't know about you, but it's quite stunning what we see here in verse 22.

Verse 22, I mean, it seems somewhat uncharacteristic for Pauline writing. Normally, he's giving a word of sort of a blessing.

He said, if anyone has no love for the Lord, let him be a curse. Oh, wow, Paul. You sure don't want to turn that around? No, he's written what he's written. Those who are guilty of wreaking havoc in the body of Christ through conduct not display affection for the Lord Jesus.

[21 : 59] Seems to be those were the ones who were in view. These are those who are a hindrance to the Lord's work in the local church. And guess what?

The church is better without them. Thus, these strong words. Let them be accursed, and our Lord come and deal with them.

Huh? So, our Lord come. Our Lord come and deal with these detractors. Deal with these ones who are out of kilter. Deal with these who really don't show the kind of affection and love for you by obedience and conformity to your word.

Huh? It's a reasonable way. To interpret and to see this verse. He knows that some who have no love for the Lord ought to be accursed, afflicted with harm.

Again, strong language, but fitting given the particular content of this letter. Because what Paul was doing, one of the headers over 1 Corinthians, he has order in the church, huh?

[23 : 04] There were some in there who didn't have that in view. He challenged them to grow up, to embrace the gospel belief and gospel behavior. And then, not only is this word to the detractors, there's a word, a blessing for God's people.

You see that in verses 23 and 24. He ends the letter where he began it. His greeting and desire for God's grace, God's marvelous favor in and through the Lord Jesus Christ.

And a note that reflects his genuine pastoral care. He said a few hard things along the way. He wanted them to know before he signed off, hey, the grace of our Lord Jesus be with you.

And not only that, my love be with you. My love be with you all in Christ Jesus. So the letter ends. It's a letter to a challenged church.

Challenged regarding its beliefs and behaviors, yet one that the Lord loved and had not given up on. The letter speaks to the power and the triumph of the gospel message in the lives of those who embrace it.

[24 : 14] Such a letter was good for believers in the first century Corinth and believers in 21st century Chicago. Huh? What's he saying? Hey, don't forget to share.

Don't forget to take a stand. Don't forget to recognize those who serve. These things are a part, friends, of gospel living and need to be said.

And said them he did. The posture of those who are alive in Christ and who live in cities, whether in Corinth or Chicago, these are things that you and I need to hear even in our day.

And may we hear them, respond to them, and live them for the glory and honor of his name. Amen.