

# 1 Corinthians 16:1-24 PM

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, good evening again, everyone. For those of you who are new here, or if you're joining us for the first time, I just want to begin with a word of welcome. We're so glad you're here with us tonight.

And as we've already talked about here tonight, I just had this interview, my name is Willie Shane Ross. I'm a minister here on staff at St. John's for a couple more weeks, and it's truly a joy to be with you here tonight. And it's a joy because we have finally reached the end of 1 Corinthians.

I don't know if you've known this, but we've been studying this for the better part of a year, and we've studied this together now for 27 Sundays. I counted it up. 27 Sundays, and at last we come to Paul's conclusion in chapter 16, and this chapter can feel confusing.

Perhaps it feels a bit underwhelming. In fact, perhaps as we have read it, our eyes glazed over. And that's because the details probably don't mean a lot to us here today.

After all, in my first read-through, I thought, well, verses 1 to 4, Paul says something about a collection, then you get verses 5 to 12, and you get this wishy-washy travel itinerary, which, by the way, might not be out of place with our West Coast sensibilities.

[ 1 : 09 ] And then you get verses 13 to 24, and you get a litany of funny-sounding names. And you go, oh, that's great. Paul has some friends. And my point in this is that it's hard to see how this chapter applies to our lives today.

And by the way, this is actually a good reminder that though Scripture is for us, it is not written to us. And so as a way to kind of frame this chapter, zoom out with me real quick.

You see, the whole book of Corinthians is bookended with the gospel. Chapter 1 starts with the cross, and chapter 15 ends with the resurrection. So all the issues that are going on in Corinth, all the strife, all the jealousy, all the dissensions, they're brought into light under the gospel.

And then you have chapter 16. And it can feel a bit like a postscript to the gospel, but chapter 16 is anything but a postscript to the gospel.

Chapter 16 here before us is an application of gospel living. It's an application of gospel living in Paul's specific time and specific place.

[ 2 : 15 ] And what it shows us is it shows us that the gospel affects every part of our lives, from travel to hospitality to receiving guests. Now, the challenge for us as preachers is usually we come to a text and we have this grand theological statement.

Last week we had this great, and Mark did a great job with this great chapter on resurrection, and we work that out and we work out application and implication for you if we do our job well. But here we have application.

And so we have to work backwards a little bit to figure out some of the principles behind the text. And so what I'm going to do tonight, however briefly I can do it, is to give you three concluding principles behind this application.

And so since 1 Corinthians is bookended by the gospel, and because the gospel transforms every aspect of our lives, I want to show you this evening what gospel living looks like.

I want to show you what gospel living looks like. And this list isn't exhaustive. It's not exhaustive even of this own chapter, but here are three marks of gospel living. First, generous gratitude. Second, gospel living is marked by labors of grace.

[ 3 : 22 ] And thirdly, gospel living is marked by loving and joyous submission to one another. But before I step into the text, would you please join me in a word of prayer?

Heavenly Father, we pray that your Spirit would be upon us this evening, and we pray that you would guide us into a life that is full of love and unity and joy for the work that you have called each of us to do.

We pray that you would enliven our faith and revive our love for you this evening. We pray this in your Son's name. Amen. Now, if you haven't yet, I'd actually invite you to open up your Bibles to 1 Corinthians 16 so that you can follow along.

Now, as I mentioned at the beginning, these verses can almost feel a bit like a postscript, like as if Paul has been reveling in the magnificence of chapter 15, in the magnificence of the resurrection, and gone, oh, by the way, Corinth, one more thing I forgot to mention, this thing about money.

But that's not what he's doing. You see, this isn't a one-offhand collection, and it's not Paul talking about tithing per se. Paul here is talking about a very specific ministry.

[ 4 : 34 ] You see, this is a ministry collection that he's been working on and will work on for months and if not years. And that's because this collection has huge ramifications for the gospel. You see, this collection is mentioned at least three other times in Scripture.

Acts 21, Romans 15, and he brings it up again in 2 Corinthians chapter 8 and 9. And what we know is that the Jerusalem church at this time was in deep financial crisis and deep hardship.

And so, Paul wants the Gentile churches to send this financial gift to Jerusalem. And so, the purpose of this collection is twofold. First, he wants them to support the brothers and the sisters in the time of need.

And we see that purpose throughout Scripture over and over again. But B, secondly, it was also incredibly important because this gift is a witness to the gospel. It is a witness to the power of the gospel to bring unity to Gentiles and Jews.

You see, this is a potential turning point for the life of the church. Jews and Gentiles hated each other. And for hundreds of years, Gentiles were considered unclean and Jews called Gentiles dogs. And so, there was a huge wall of hostility between the two groups.

[ 5 : 46 ] But, Paul is talking here about, or has just been talking about resurrection in chapter 15. And if the resurrection is true, and if the resurrection has torn down the dividing wall between God and humanity, then the walls between the Jewish Christians and the Gentile Christians must fall as well.

So, what Paul is doing is he is applying the gospel to the church's giving. He is saying that love between brothers and sisters in Christ must now be worked out in practical and concrete ways.

And that's seen in their giving. And so, the gospel brings humanity together in Christ. And the purpose of this gift, then, is to show that power of the gospel in loving reconciliation, in gospel unity.

That's the purpose of the gift. It's working out love concretely and practically. That's the purpose. But Paul wants to make sure, too, that the Corinthians have the correct posture for giving as well.

You see, in the ancient world, people don't actually give out of a sense of altruistic or moral compunction. They give as a way to gain status. You see, if I give money to Mark over there, if I give money to him, he now owes me recognition and status.

[ 7 : 08 ] So, when I want to seize political power, Mark, you're going to back me, right? You're not nodding, Mark. But, see, that's not how Paul wants them to give.

Giving is not a power play. See, Paul brings up this collection again. And if you flip to 2 Corinthians 8, there Paul says, quote, You see, the Corinthians aren't supposed to give so that they can make the Corinthian church great.

Giving is a response. It's a posture of the heart. Giving is a posture of gratitude. And it's a response to Jesus' grace towards you. I mean, ask yourself, when you look at that 2 Corinthians passage, why would Jesus leave the heavenly throne room of grace and love and joy and beauty and goodness?

What would compel someone, let alone God himself, to become poor, to willingly take on rejection, humiliation, and crucifixion? Well, it's because there's one thing he lacked.

He lacked you. He lacked me. And he wanted to bring you and me home. He wanted to make you heirs with him.

[ 8 : 36 ] And when you understand this, it'll change how you give. It'll transform your posture. And you give out of a sense of gratitude because God has given me so much. How could I not give to others?

And what happens then is giving becomes a joy and you become generous. And so the purpose of this collection, yes, it's to bring about loving reconciliation. But the posture of giving is a response to God's love and grace.

And finally, in the passage, there's a clear pattern for giving as well. Giving is orderly and it's structured and it's proportional. If you look at verse 2 in chapter 16 here, on the first day of the week, put something aside and store it up as he may prosper.

Giving is orderly. It's planned. You don't spend all your money and see what you have left over to give. You plan it. It's the first line in your budget item. Giving is structured. It's not once.

It's not a once-off. It's given consistently each week. And finally, it's given as one may prosper. In other words, we give as God blesses us. And in God's economy, remember this, friends.

[ 9 : 42 ] It's not the size of the gift itself that matters. You see that in Scripture all the time. It's the posture behind the giving. Are you giving out of a scarcity mindset?

Or are you excited to give as a blessing to others? Do we understand as Christians that we give because God has already blessed us so much in Christ Jesus? And by the way, let me say one last thing about giving.

We all have something to give. Some of us are rich in money. Some of us are rich in time. Some of us are rich in talent and resources. And we give as a sign of God's work in our lives.

We give as a sign of the ways he has transformed us. And when we give like that, we give generously. After all, it's all God's money anyways. And we give gratefully because he's given us eternal life. What is wealth compared to eternal life?

So that's point one. Gospel life is marked by generous gratitude. And my second point is gospel life is marked by labors of grace. Now what on earth do I mean by that?

[ 10 : 49 ] Well, when we get to verses 5 to 12 here, if you're following along, we get this travel itinerary. And in this section, Paul is basically telling Corinth, look, Corinth, I want to visit you.

I plan to visit you. But it's going to be up to God ultimately. And that's because Paul is committed to God's work, not his own. You see, instead he plans to send Timothy, who is also, by the way, as he says, doing God's work.

And in fact, if you jump down a few verses, when he talks about Stephanas in verse 16, he'll encourage submission to those who are laborers and workers. Laborers, workers, doing God's work.

Bit of a theme here. And this is hugely important for the Corinthian church. Because as we've gone through this letter, we've seen that they've just forgotten whose work this is at the end of the day.

They've globbed onto their favorite preachers and created factions. They're using the Holy Spirit's giftings to puff up their own status. And they've fought one another in pursuit of personal recognition and greatness.

[ 11 : 53 ] And so Paul is reminding him that everything, travel, doors of opportunity, and the people that even come under your ministry are all part of God's plan and work, not yours.

And so when we engage in gospel work, we're doing God's labor, not ours. And friends, when I say that, I'm not talking about just preaching here from the pulpit.

I'm not talking about doing the sacraments. I'm not talking even about Aaron's job per se. I'm talking about everyday ministry. Discipling your children. Caring for your neighbors.

Growing with your friends. Making soup for Soup Sunday. Leading Bible studies. Whatever it may be. Every single one of those is a labor in God's work. And if we belong to Christ, we work for God and not ourselves.

Now, that has a whole host of implications in it. But let me just draw a few out in the text with us. First, when we work for God, we have to remember there's no ideal ministry. We don't choose who we minister to.

[ 12 : 56 ] We don't choose where we minister to. And in the text, Paul wants to visit the Corinthians, but understands that it's ultimately going to be up to God. And in fact, he says a wide door has opened for him.

So Paul has plans. He has desires. But ultimately, he serves where God places him. And we're to labor in the same way.

We have plans. We have desires, sure. But are we ministering faithfully? Are we ministering to those whom God has actually placed in our lives? Families, friends, brothers and sisters in the pews next to you.

Second, when we work with the Lord, we always work with others. Ministry is never a one-man band. Ministry is always done with fellow co-workers in Christ.

And Paul underscores this, by the way, when he tries to send Apollos. I don't know if you all remember this, but in 1 Corinthians 1, Apollos has got a huge fan club. Everybody loves Apollos.

[ 13 : 54 ] And if ministry were all about Paul, he would never send Apollos to Corinth. But Paul understands this. Apollos has gifts.

And those gifts can be used for the gospel. You see, laboring for God is not a one-man band. There's no room for ego. We need each other, and we need to work together for the gospel.

Third implication is that the labor in the Lord is not comfortable. It's not comfortable. You see, in verse 9, Paul says, Yeah, the door is open for me, but there are many adversaries.

Many adversaries. Now, I know for myself, I often want a lot of comfort. I want a lot of ease. I want conflict-free relationships. Especially in ministry, I want conflict-free relationships.

But living and working for God is not a life of comfort. For Paul, his labors are filled with hardships. In fact, in his next letter in 2 Corinthians, he's going to say, Here are all the hardships I've gone through.

[14:57] Five times he's received 40 lashes minus one. Three times he's beaten with rods. One stone. Three times shipwrecked. Sleepless nights. Often without food. And it's not a comfortable life. And so you look at this, and if you're like me, you're kind of going, Well, why did Paul do this?

If this is what he had to endure, why engage in ministry? Why should I engage in ministry if the models of ministry and Scripture don't have comfortable lives? Allow me to illustrate.

Many of you know my wife and daughter, Hazel. And for those of you that don't, that are visiting, Hazel is one of the little girls kind of running around here. Now, my wife went through a labor about two years ago.

It's Hazel's birthday a couple weeks ago. But my wife went through a labor two years ago that was over 36 hours. It was so intense that she had morphine twice, and on the second time it did absolutely nothing to ease her pain.

It was absolutely relentless. But when I asked her at the end of it, after all of it, and after watching it, I asked, How did you do it? How did you go through that?

[16:00] She responded with, Well, it was worth it. It was worth it. The joy of welcoming Hazel into our lives far outweighed anything and everything Kathy had to suffer to get there.

And that's the joy Paul is talking about. For Paul, the joy of God's grace, God's love, God's mercy, his death and resurrection, makes every labor, every endeavor, every hardship worth it.

You see, gospel living is laboring in that grace. In fact, in the previous chapter, Paul talks about labor, and he talks about it as grace working in me.

And when that grace works in you, Jesus Christ becomes the center of your lives, and everything you do, everything we do, orbits around him because of the joy of serving him. So gospel life is marked by labors in grace.

And now on to point three, the gospel life is marked by joyous and loving submission. Look with me at Paul's final section, and it starts with verses 13 to 14.

[17:17] And in verse 13 and 14, we get this staccato kind of rapid-fire series of imperatives. It's almost like a drill sergeant, and Paul is giving his final orders before departing.

Quote, Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong, let all that you do be done in love. End quote. Five commands.

Those first four are almost military, or really they are military instructions. By the way, that phrase, act like a man, that's in there? The Greek word can also mean courageous.

And it's the word used in Joshua, actually, when Joshua is about to cross into the promised land. Be strong and courageous. And so Paul here gives these final warnings because the pressures and the pleasures of this world are always a threat to our walk with Christ.

If we're not vigilant as Christians, we'll either succumb to pressure and deny our faith, or we'll give in to pleasure, and our faith will slip away. It was true then, and it's equally true now.

[18:27] We're surrounded by anti-Christian ideologies, and we live in the most affluent period in human history. Pressures and pleasures. Pressures and pleasures will always reveal the nature of our hearts.

In other words, one of the things Paul's saying here is we can't coast on the good news of the gospel. We have to be tending, submitting, and applying the gospel to our lives day in and day out.

And we do this in a very practical way in verse 14, by doing everything in love. Paul says it here in verse 14, and he's going to conclude in verse 24, when he says, My love with you all in Christ Jesus.

So this closing section of the letter is bookended with love, and in the middle we have an illustration and example. Stephanas. Stephanas and his household have dedicated themselves to the service of the saints, and now Paul urges Corinth to submit to people who serve like this.

I don't know about you, but submission for me was not a virtue growing up, and every time I hear that I still cringe a little bit inside. Part of that has to do with my own upbringing. My father's favorite poem when I was growing up was *Invictus*.

[ 19 : 40 ] I don't know how many of you have heard that poem, but it has a famous last line, I'm the master of my fate and the captain of my soul. It's a poem that celebrates individualism and pride and self-sufficiency.

But that's not the message of the gospel. You see, look at who Paul is also ordering the Corinthians to submit to. Submit to those who serve you in Christ Jesus, laborers and workers, the people who have been serving Paul, and that means putting their needs ahead of yours.

That means submitting means giving honor and recognition. It means loving and serving them in the day-to-day practical needs. But it is mutual. It's always mutual, or should be mutual.

Factions, egos, dissensions, all these things that are going on in Corinth, they have no place when love is listened to, when love is reigning, when people are submitting to mutual submission to one another.

And love is to put others' needs ahead of your own. And notice the fruit of the submission. Quote, I rejoice at the coming of Stephanas and Fortunatus and Achaëus, because they have made up for your absence, for they refreshed my spirit as well as yours.

[ 20 : 51 ] Give recognition to such people. Do you not see that there's rejoicing? That there's rejuvenation in the spirit? In marriage, we make vows to submit to each other.

And when we submit to each other, there's so much joy in our relationship. And we get to move out into the world refreshed, and we get to move out in strength. But when we try to go our own way, when we try to get what we want, we stop submitting, we stop serving.

And so marriage ends up feeling a bit more like a cold war, and we move out in weakness. And so here, Paul wants the Corinthian church to submit and honor those who work in the gospel, those who put others' needs ahead of their own.

And when communities do this, there is joy and love and peace. There's no division. There's no egos. There's joy and love. And you actually see this joy in the greetings at the very end. And I love this verse, where they give a hearty greeting in the Lord, Priscilla and Aquila.

It's the language of family. And I love it because here in 1 Corinthians, we've been spending 27 weeks in it. It's a church that's messed up. It's a church where people are suing each other. It's a church where somebody's sleeping with a father's wife.

[ 22 : 04 ] It has all sorts of problems. And people don't go, well, I don't know, maybe we should kick out first at the Corinthian church. They're not acting like Christians. No. They still greet each other in love and in hearty thanks to the Lord.

You see, the gospel doesn't transform just us. It transforms us into a new family, a new community. The gospel transforms us like this, because that is how Jesus Christ lives.

Jesus Christ gave up his wealth, became poor, and he did that in order to bring you home. When you understand that, when you understand the cross and the resurrection deeply, it transforms you in these manners.

And so, friends, let me just conclude real quickly by reminding us that the gospel is not something we earn. It's something we receive. It's something we experience. And it's something that has a transforming power in our lives.

And if you're here and you don't understand that, come talk to me. Come talk to Aaron. Come talk to us. The gospel is a beautiful thing. And my prayer for you all as I leave St. John's is that you would continue to walk faithfully, steadfastly, and vigilantly in the gospel.

[ 23 : 13 ] Don't lose sight of it. Keep steadfast. Cling to Jesus. And he will answer you in ways you cannot even begin to imagine.

Amen.