

# Do Everything in Love

1 Corinthians 16:1-24

Key Verse: 16:13-14

**“Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be men of courage; be strong. Do everything in love.”**

Chapter 16 is the epilogue of Paul's letter to the Corinthians. Paul deals with several matters. He instructs them about the collection for God's people (1-4). He shares with them his future travel plans (4-8). He tells them to respect coworkers and leaders (9-12; 15-18). He exhorts them to faith and love (13-14). And finally, Paul shares greetings (19-24). There are many things to learn. Among them, Paul's final exhortation summarizes the essential teaching of his letter. Through this message, let's accept this final exhortation in our hearts, and hold on to it.

## **I. Prepare your gift for God's people (1-4)**

Look at verse 1a. "Now about the collection for God's people...." The word "collection," that is "logia" in Greek, appears only here in the Bible. It refers to collecting money for an offering. Many people talk about money as of first importance. However, Paul mentions this collection last, at the end of his letter. According to verse 1b, Galatian churches would also participate. Verse 3b clarifies that it was to be sent to Jerusalem. No doubt, this refers to the collection Paul was taking up from the Gentile churches, mentioned in Romans 15:25-27. Saints in Jerusalem were in need, perhaps because of persecution (Ac 8:1) or widespread famine (Ac 11:28). Paul saw this as an opportunity for the Gentile Christians to express love for Jewish brothers, and to acknowledge their spiritual debt by giving materially. It was not just a relief offering. It had a spiritual meaning of uniting Jew and Gentile in Christ.

In verse 1b, Paul said, "Do what I told the Galatian churches to do." As an apostle of Christ Jesus, Paul gave spiritual direction about giving--not just to the Corinthians, but to other churches as well. In verse 2, Paul explained specifically what they should do: "On the first day of the 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." The first day of the week was Sunday, the Lord's day. This is the day of Christian worship. The offering was to be presented as part of their worship of God. It was not just a relief offering for other people; it was an offering to God.

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Why should we offer to God? First, because God is the owner of all things. In Psalm 50:11,12 the Lord says, "I know every bird in the mountains, and the creatures of the field are mine. If I were hungry I would not tell you, for the world is mine, and all that is in it." The world belongs to God. As Jesus taught in the parable of the tenants, God is the owner and we are the stewards (Mk 12:2). To have a right relationship with God we must offer fruit to God. Second, God commanded tithe offering in the Old Testament (Nu 18). According to Malachi, the tithe belongs to God; it is not ours. To withhold our tithe is to rob God (Mal 3:8). Third, God promises to bless those who offer tithes to him. Malachi 3:10b says, "Test me in this, and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it." There are many who testify that God keeps his promise. When Abraham won a great victory over enemies, he offered a tithe to God through his servant, Melchizedek (Gen 14:20). When Jacob made a covenant with God, he promised to give back a tenth of all God gave him (Gen 28:22). These ancestors of faith were abundantly blessed by God. In American history, John D. Rockefeller was faithful in giving a tithe to God throughout his lifetime. He confessed that his great success was God's blessing on tithing. One poor widow, who offered to God all she had to live on, was commended by Jesus (Mk 12:43-44). She teaches how to give our hearts to God, and how to give by faith. This kind of giving pleases God.

Verse 2 says, "On the first day of every week...." Giving to God is first; it should take priority in one's budget, and should be done regularly, not just once in a while. Furthermore, "each one" should offer. It is not enough that one's father offers to God, "each one" must offer to God. We should "set aside a sum of money," preparing in advance--not shuffling through our pockets at the last minute as the offering basket comes around. In verse 3, this offering is called a "gift." Here, the Greek word for gift is "charis," which also means "grace." Christian giving should be willing and joyful, with a deep sense of God's grace. It should not be legalistic. Since Christ died for us, to forgive our sins and give us eternal life, we owe everything to Christ. When we offer materially, it should be with a sense of gratitude and worship.

Look at verse 3. "Then, when I arrive, I will give letters of introduction to the men you approve and send them with your gift to Jerusalem." The Corinthians should choose faithful representatives to take the offering to Jerusalem (1 Cor 4:2). They were not just giving money, but making a spiritual relationship with Jerusalem believers, by the help of Paul (4). Here we learn that material giving is part of worship, and sharing with fellow believers in their time of need brings spiritual

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unity to the body of Christ. We thank God for all who have participated in special offerings, car washes, yard sales, bake sales, and so on to help international delegates to attend the Purdue Conference. Let's give all the more as an act of worship to God, and for the blessing of our dear brothers and sisters in Christ.

## **II. Paul's plans, and requests regarding coworkers (5-12; 15-18)**

Verses 5-7 explain Paul's travel plan. He would go through Macedonia, visiting churches, and then continue on to Corinth (5). Paul hoped he could "stay awhile, or even spend the winter" (6). He did not want to "make only a passing visit...[but] to spend time with [them]" (7). As we have studied, there were many problems in Corinth. Some people would have avoided the Corinthians, saying "Hello," as they passed by, or sending superficial e-mails. However, Paul was a true shepherd. In their time of need, he wanted to be with them. He was ready to bear misunderstanding and pain to share fellowship and have Bible study with them. Paul also respected them. In verse 6, Paul said, "...so that you can help me on my journey...." Paul knew they were spiritually immature. But he treated them as valuable coworkers who could participate meaningfully in world mission. Still, Paul concluded, "...if the Lord permits" (7). Paul submitted his plans to the Lord's guidance.

In keeping with this principle, Paul decided to stay in Ephesus. Why? He said in verse 9. "...because a great door for effective work has opened to me, and there are many who oppose me." As we learn in Acts 19, when Paul visited Ephesus, he found a handful of disciples already there. However, there was something strange about them. They never expressed any spiritual joy. When they sang a hymn, it sounded like a funeral march. So Paul asked, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" They said, "No, we did not even hear that there is a Holy Spirit." So Paul shared the good news with them and baptized them in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they received the Holy Spirit and began to speak in tongues and prophesy. Suddenly, they all became promising Bible messengers! Paul began to have Bible discussions with them daily in the lecture hall of Tyrannus. Within two years, all the Jews and Greeks in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord (Ac 19:10). There was a great work of repentance and many burned their sorcery scrolls publicly to renounce their evil deeds. One whole region of the world was being liberated from the devil's power. So, the hindrance of Satan was to be expected. Paul suffered harm and his life was in danger. It was costly for Paul to remain in Ephesus. Moreover, Paul's heart ached to visit Corinth. However, Paul made a clear decision to stay in Ephesus, following the work of the Holy Spirit.

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This is what made Paul so useful in the work of God. When we follow the work of the Holy Spirit, we can be used greatly by God. However, one who ignores the leading of the Holy Spirit is useless.

Though Paul could not visit Corinth at once, he did what he could. Paul sent Timothy by way of Macedonia (Ac 19:22). Timothy, Paul's spiritual son, had learned his gospel faith and lifestyle. As 4:17 says, Paul wanted Timothy to share this with the Corinthians. However, Timothy was different than Paul. Paul was a strong, charismatic leader. Timothy was timid. Paul worried that in the volatile Corinthian church, members would intimidate Timothy and make him fearful. Rude people offend God, and God's servants. Rude people create an atmosphere of cynicism and hostility. Then they forfeit God's blessing. So Paul warned the Corinthians, "...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" (10). When the Corinthians respected Timothy, as they did Paul, God would bless them. Let's respect God's servants from our hearts.

Look at verse 12. Paul wanted to send Apollos to Corinth as well. Paul valued Apollos as a coworker and called him "our brother." Paul declared his trust in Apollos and supported his ministry in Corinth, even though there had been a division problem. It was Apollos who was reluctant to go to Corinth.

In verses 15-18, Paul mentions some of the Corinthian leaders. The household of Stephanus was noteworthy because they were the first converts in Achaia and devoted themselves to the service of the saints. Together with Fortunatus and Achaicus they worked hard behind the scenes for reconciliation and unity. As they brought the news of Corinth to Paul, and Paul's words of instruction to Corinth, it required humility, much prayer and constant spiritual struggle. Then through them, everyone was refreshed. Paul recognized their leadership and urged the Corinthians "to submit to such as these and to everyone who joins in the work, and labors at it" (16). In this part, we learn Paul's secret of following the work of the Holy Spirit and of coworking with others. Many think that Paul was fruitful because he was a kind of spiritual superman. But this is not true. Paul was fruitful because he followed the work of the Holy Spirit and cowedorked with many servants of God. Let's learn how to be fruitful through Paul's example.

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## **III. Stand firm in the faith (13-14; 19-24)**

In the midst of giving practical instructions, Paul paused in verses 13-14 to share one last exhortation with the Corinthians. These words summarize the essential point of Paul's letter. Let's read verses 13-14. "Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be men of courage; be strong. Do everything in love." Here we find five words of exhortation.

First, "Be on your guard." This is a warning against the devil's work. Paul knew that our struggle is not against people, but against the devil (Eph 6:12). The devil prowls around like a roaring lion, trying to drag people away from God to be his prisoner. No mere human being can defeat the devil. Jesus warned his disciples to watch and pray not to fall into temptation (Mk 14:38). When we pray, Almighty God gives us victory over the devil.

Second, "...stand firm in the faith...." Christian faith is that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures...[and] that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures..." (15:3,4). Christ saves those who believe in him from all the consequences of sin. Christ gives us eternal life and an inheritance in the kingdom of God. Christ will raise our bodies from the dead and give us glorious resurrection bodies. God gives us everything in Christ. Yet sometimes, Satan whispers, "Faith is useless. Have some fun." If we lose our faith, we lose everything. We must stand firm in the faith. Then God gives us his Holy Spirit, joy and peace, and eternal victory.

Third, "...be men of courage...." Men must be courageous. Women may be like nurturing mothers. But men must be courageous like warriors. The courage mentioned here comes from faith. It is the courage to boldly sacrifice for the work of God. Many are working hard and sacrificing much to serve the Purdue Conference. Labor in the Lord is not in vain. It will be richly rewarded by God. Let's be men of courage and sacrifice to the end.

Fourth, "...be strong." We should not be weak. With a weak mind we cannot overcome difficulties to serve God. So we must be strong. How can we be strong? Shall we work out regularly by lifting weights and jogging? Sure. But this is not enough. We must be strong in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Ti 2:1). When we repent of our sins and receive the grace of forgiveness, we can be really strong-strong enough to bear God's mission.

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Fifth, "Do everything in love." The love of Christ should be in our hearts at all times as our motive and lifesource. Whatever we do, we should do it in love. Last week, Tim and Daniel and Caleb painted the center. As they did so, they thought of Jesus, whose blood makes us white as snow. They painted joyfully, with gratitude. Others were happy to see them do this. We must do everything in love: Bible study, chorus, dancing, orchestra, serving guests, and so on. Then we can be happy and make others happy, too. God will be pleased, and our community will be healthy and strong.

In verses 19-24 Paul gives some final greetings from churches in the province of Asia, from Aquila and Priscilla and their house church, and from all the brothers. Paul said, "Greet one another with a holy kiss." It was customary for Greek people of the time to greet others of the same gender with a hug and kiss. Paul wanted to redeem this custom and use it to encourage the affection of Christ in the Christian community. This is not necessarily something we should take literally today. Look at verse 22. Paul is not expressing personal anger at those who do not love the Lord. He is explaining that only Christ can save us from curse. Without Christ, everyone is subject to the Lord's righteous judgment. Then Paul cried, "Come, O Lord!" He longed for Jesus' coming in power and glory. Finally Paul says, "The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you. My love to all of you in Christ Jesus. Amen." Though Paul had said many things to them in his letter, some of which were hard to digest, he ends with the grace of Christ, and love. The grace of Christ is greater than all our sin. The love of God unites us in the body of Christ, even though we have many weaknesses and problems.

As we finish the study of 1 Corinthians, let's pray that we may do everything in love.