

1 Corinthians 16

- Today we study the 16th and final chapter of Paul's letter
 - With it comes Paul's answers to the final two questions he was asked through Chloe's delegation
 - The first question concerns the proper manner for giving for the needs of the saints
 - The second question concerns the possible return of Apollos to Corinth
 - Lastly, Paul wraps up the letter with some words of encouragement to the church and instructions on obeying leaders
 - The correction of the letter is behind us at this point
 - All that remains is instruction on these points as Paul brings his letter to a close
- Paul opens the chapter with the family "now concerning" phrase, which indicates we are moving away from the prior topic of resurrection and into a new topic

[1Cor. 16:1](#) Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I directed the churches of Galatia, so do you also.

[1Cor. 16:2](#) On the first day of every week each one of you is to put aside and save, as he may prosper, so that no collections be made when I come.

[1Cor. 16:3](#) When I arrive, whomever you may approve, I will send them with letters to carry your gift to Jerusalem;

[1Cor. 16:4](#) and if it is fitting for me to go also, they will go with me.

- The next question the church asked Paul to address was the proper manner for the collection of the saints
 - Paul's answer gives us the opportunity to examine the biblical expectation for how we are to support the body of Christ financially
 - One of the reasons I am dedicated to preaching and teaching in a verse-by-verse style rather than in a topical style is the freedom it gives me to address sensitive topics

- As we move through books of the Bible teaching the whole counsel of God, inevitably we will come across a topic that we don't want to hear
 - Topics that cause us to become defensive or even angry
- When a topical teacher raises one of these issues on some Sunday, we're tempted by our flesh to accuse the preacher of having an agenda
 - Rather than crediting the Holy Spirit with drawing our attention to a problem in our thinking or behavior, we tell ourselves that the pastor was just picking a fight for selfish reasons
 - And on the basis of that thinking, we find our excuse to dismiss whatever instructions the teacher offers from scripture
- The opening topic of chapter 16 is a good example of one of these sensitive topics
 - Some of us may have been conditioned through past experiences to react negatively to any discussion of giving
 - We may assume the pastor wants more money for himself
 - Or for his ambitious grandiose building plans
 - So we brace ourselves for the guilt trip that we know must be coming
 - And as a result we close our ears and hearts to the conviction of the Holy Spirit
 - On the other hand, when you and I have been studying a book of the Bible verse-by-verse, everything changes
 - Both the audience and the teacher are constrained by the text of scripture
 - We must address whatever topics we find on each page
 - Verse by verse teaching ensures that ears and hearts remain open, since at least they can't impugn the motives of the teacher
 - Whatever else you might say, you can't say I chose this topic for personal reasons
 - The Holy Spirit chose it, and so we should all be listening closely

- The church in Corinth was unclear on the expectations for Christian giving, so they ask Paul to clarify the practice
 - Paul's answer will surprise many Christians, both for what he says and for what he doesn't say
 - Paul says in v.1 that he is giving the church in Corinth the same instructions he gave to the church in Galatia
 - This comment is important because it shows us that Paul was teaching a consistent approach to giving throughout the New Testament church
 - These are not unique instructions for just one church or situation
 - This is Paul's prescribed manner for giving for all churches, including our's today
 - Then in v.2 Paul gives us the manner for giving
 - Before we look at his instructions, let's take a moment to reflect on how little Paul says on this topic
 - To my knowledge, this is the only verse in all the New Testament letters that specifically addresses the manner of giving in the church
 - One verse only
 - To be sure, Jesus speaks extensively about money in the Gospels
 - He talks about the need to be generous, selfless and unattached to our money
 - He speaks of storing up treasure in Heaven and not merely on earth
 - He speaks of being a good steward and caring for the needs of others
 - But when we ask what are the rules for how to fulfill these expectations with our giving, we find only this one verse
 - Now consider how much preaching takes place on this topic
 - Something's wrong when preachers are far more fixated on Christian giving than the Bible is

- Also, take note that a certain word is missing from Paul's directions
 - That word is tithe or tithing
 - Tithe is a word that means one tenth
 - The common teaching in the church today is that Israel was required to give one tenth of their income to God
 - Therefore, today Christians are required to give one tenth of their income to the church
 - In reality, neither idea is biblically correct
 - The word tithe first appears in the Bible in Genesis 14
 - It describes Abraham's contribution to Melchizedek from the war spoils he obtained defending Lot
 - Abraham gave one tenth as a thanks to God
 - Later in the covenant given to Israel, the Lord incorporated the concept of tithing into the Law
 - But Israel was required to give far more than one tenth to the Lord
 - In reality, the Law contains three separate tithing requirements for Israel
 - In Numbers 18, Israel was required to give a tithe to support the priests
 - In Deut 12 the nation was required to give an additional tithe to support the three feasts of Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles
 - And in Deut 14 the nation was required to give a third tithe for the poor
 - Taken together, these tithing requirements amounted to upwards of 30% of a Jew's income
 - So if someone is to argue that Christians should repeat the pattern of Israel, then be careful what you wish for
 - Because we're signing up to a commitment well beyond just ten percent
 - We're signing up for 30%

- Of course, the Christian is not bound by the Law of Moses
 - That law was given to Israel as part of their Old Covenant
 - Paul tells us in numerous places that if we are under the grace of the New Covenant, then we are not under the Law of Moses
 - Therefore, the tithing requirements of the Old Covenant are not the standard for our giving today
 - In fact, we can't tithe as required under the Law, because the institutions designated by the Lord to receive Israel's tithes don't exist any longer
 - The Jewish priesthood does not exist today
 - And the temple is not operating
 - So without these institutions in existence, it is literally impossible to tithe according to the Law
 - This is why Paul never uses the word tithe in any of his letters
 - In fact, the concept of tithing is completely missing from the New Testament
 - The Bible never commands a Christian to tithe
 - So if you have ever heard a Bible teacher or preacher tell you that we have an obligation to "tithe" that is to give 10% to the church, then you have not heard the truth according to scripture
 - Because tithing in Israel meant 30%, not 10%
 - Secondly, tithing was a prescription for Israel only, and it's never repeated to the New Testament Christian
- So with that background, we're now in a position to consider Paul's instructions with an open mind for what the Christian should do to demonstrate a generous heart
 - First, Paul asks the church to put aside money in savings on the first of every week
 - The mention of the first of the week is a measure of regularity and consistency
 - I don't believe Paul is intending to prescribe the exact interval or day of the week for our setting aside

- I believe his point is that we are to be diligent and committed to setting aside some of our income on a regular basis in order to give it away
- Notice again that Paul never designates an amount
 - He doesn't say how much we set aside because the New Testament believer has liberty in this area of life
 - We set aside whatever amount the Lord places on our heart
 - If you feel led to set aside 10%, then so be it
 - If you feel led to give more or less, than do so
 - Whatever you do, you must be convinced in your own heart that it is what the Lord is asking from you
- But notice in the next part of v.2 Paul says we should set aside as we prosper
 - In other words, as our income rises and falls, so should our setting aside
 - In good months and good years, we are expected to become more generous
 - And in lean times, we are expected to adjust our saving accordingly
 - This only makes sense of course, but while it's often easy to adjust downward, don't forget to adjust back upward when business picks up
- Next, Paul says that no collection was to be made when Paul arrived in Corinth
 - When Paul arrived in any city, like Corinth, he always asked the church to make a contribution for the needs of the next church on Paul's itinerary
 - Notice in vs.3-4 Paul mentioned his intention to take a contribution from Corinth to the believers in Jerusalem when he departs
 - When Paul left the church in Macedonia to travel to Corinth for time, the believers in Macedonia gave a contribution to Paul to fund his work in Corinth
 - Paul reminded this church of their generosity in his next letter

[2Cor. 8:1](#) Now, brethren, we wish to make known to you the grace of God which has been given in the churches of Macedonia,
[2Cor. 8:2](#) that in a great ordeal of affliction their abundance of joy and their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality.
[2Cor. 8:3](#) For I testify that according to their ability, and beyond their ability, they gave of their own accord,
[2Cor. 8:4](#) begging us with much urging for the favor of participation in the support of the saints,
[2Cor. 8:5](#) and this, not as we had expected, but they first gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God.

- The church in Macedonia was poor while the people in Corinth were wealthy
 - Nevertheless the believers in Macedonia wanted to support Paul's work in the Gospel
 - Later in 2Cor, Paul turns the tables on the church in Corinth asking them to support the poor believers in Macedonia
- But Paul didn't want these collections taken merely on the occasion of his visits
 - He didn't want his arrival to be the cause for the church's giving behavior
 - He wanted the Church's giving behavior to be consistent, not based on circumstances
 - More importantly, Paul's ministry was funded by those who had benefited from God's work in a previous day
 - Paul never burdened those he was serving at the time
- VBVM follows this same pattern
 - We never ask for funds from those we serve as we serve them
 - Instead, we depend on the generosity of those who have been blessed by our work in the past and want to ensure others may be blessed in the future
 - That was Paul's pattern

- Lastly, notice where our giving is to go: into our own savings
 - The believer is called to save up privately for the needs of the saints
 - We set aside a portion of our income into a fund designated for the needs of the saints
 - Then as needs are brought to our attention, we have a ready resource from which to fund our giving
 - There is no requirement in scripture that our giving go automatically to a single institution or body
 - There is no expectation in scripture that churches have bank accounts with large balances that we sustain
 - We don't depend on the church to hand out funds on our behalf
 - We should take an active part in that distribution
 - On the other hand, remember the three reasons the Lord told Israel to tithe
 - They were called to support the needs of the priests and temple
 - To caring for those who dedicated themselves to ministering to nation in corporate worship
 - They were called to support the feast celebrations in Israel
 - To support the corporate activities of the body
 - And they were called to support the poor in Israel
 - To care for the needs of those who lacked what we have received from the Lord in abundance
 - These three reasons have parallels in the Christian experience
 - Like Israel, we set aside funds to support the needs of those who minister to us
 - We fund the operation of the church and the programs that provide us spiritual benefit
 - And we come to the aid of those in the church who have needs
- Of course, this system depends on our self-discipline and willingness to obey the Spirit

- We must have the self discipline to store up regularly
- We must be willing to obey the Spirit's prompting for how much to store
- We must have the integrity not to rob from the fund recognizing it has become God's money
- And we must have the generosity to distribute the funds as the Lord leads without hesitation
- Like every experience in our Christian life, liberty gives us an opportunity to walk in the Spirit and in freedom
 - But the benefits of liberty depend on spiritual maturity
 - Liberty in the hands of an undisciplined, immature Christian leads to license to sin
 - And in the end, the one who suffers the most will be that Christian himself who abuses his liberty
 - When we walk in obedience, we will be blessed
- Next, Paul describes his travel plans with the church

1Cor. 16:5 But I will come to you after I go through Macedonia, for I am going through Macedonia;

1Cor. 16:6 and perhaps I will stay with you, or even spend the winter, so that you may send me on my way wherever I may go.

1Cor. 16:7 For I do not wish to see you now just in passing; for I hope to remain with you for some time, if the Lord permits.

1Cor. 16:8 But I will remain in Ephesus until Pentecost;

1Cor. 16:9 for a wide door for effective service has opened to me, and there are many adversaries.

1Cor. 16:10 Now if Timothy comes, see that he is with you without cause to be afraid, for he is doing the Lord's work, as I also am.

1Cor. 16:11 So let no one despise him. But send him on his way in peace, so that he may come to me; for I expect him with the brethren.

1Cor. 16:12 But concerning Apollos our brother, I encouraged him greatly to come to you with the brethren; and it was not at all his desire to come now, but he will come when he has opportunity.

- Paul wrote this letter while he was working with Timothy in Ephesus, and as he wrote he planned to travel north to Macedonia before returning to Corinth

- He mentions these plans probably because his supporters in the city were looking forward to his return and wondered when it would happen
- We know from 2Corinthians, Paul changed his plans and went directly to Corinth from Ephesus
 - He did spend a winter with them as he promised, but it was a year later than he expected
 - He says he wanted to spend time with them, probably because he has seen the need to deal with so many apparent problems
 - His reference to Pentecost means he wrote this in Spring, but it also suggests that Paul's religious year was still driven primarily by the Jewish feasts
- In v.9, Paul speaks of a great opportunity in Ephesus which requires he spend more time in that city
 - He describes the opportunity as an open door, which is a favorite metaphor meaning opportunity for people to know the Gospel
 - And yet that occasion is accompanied by many adversaries
 - This is a very different attitude than we may encounter in the logic of the church today
- Today, when we encounter many adversaries or opposition, we often declare the door of opportunity is closed
 - Strong resistance is interpreted as a reason to pause or re-evaluate our plans
 - But the true measure of opportunity in ministry is the amount of fruit available, not the ease with which we harvest it
 - Paul was determined to stay in Ephesus because he saw great opportunity with Timothy
 - And the great resistance he faced was all the more reason for Paul to remain and fight for the Gospel
- Speaking of Timothy, Paul tells the church he will send Timothy in his place, and they must receive him as they received Paul
 - He asks them not to despise Timothy

- That's quite the endorsement of Timothy
- Paul is simply speaking honestly knowing the Greek culture placed an emphasis on strength and age, neither of which Timothy possessed
- Timothy was young and prone to stomach problems
- He wasn't going to strike a powerful image in Corinth, but Paul sent him anyway because he knew the Lord was working in Timothy in a great way
 - Perhaps this Paul's strategy
 - Perhaps Paul intentionally sent someone in his place, who the Corinthians would not be tempted to idolize as they had Paul and Apollos
 - This is another perspective VBVM I tries to emulate
 - To the extent possible, we want to diminish my profile and the profile of other teachers to guard against encouraging a celebrity mindset among those who hear our teaching
- You can see that celebrity mindset in the Corinthian church, to a degree, when they ask Paul the final question of the letter in v.12
 - While some wanted to know when Paul was returning, others wanted to know when Apollos was returning
 - Remembering that the letter began with the Paul vs. Apollos argument, here we see those factions still seeking for their respective hero
- Paul answers their question, saying that he encouraged Apollos to come back, but Apollos had no interest in returning at this time
 - Paul's strong statement seems designed to reassure Apollos' followers that Paul was not to blame for Apollos' reluctance to return
 - We don't know Apollos' reasons nor do we know if he ever did return
 - But I suspect that Apollos was staying away to avoid feeding the unhealthy desires of his "followers" in that city
 - Apollos didn't want followers anymore than Paul did

- Both men wanted the church to follow Christ alone
- Then to finish the letter, Paul gives a few instructions and greetings to the church

[1Cor. 16:13](#) Be on the alert, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong.

[1Cor. 16:14](#) Let all that you do be done in love.

[1Cor. 16:15](#) Now I urge you, brethren (you know the household of Stephanas, that they were the first fruits of Achaia, and that they have devoted themselves for ministry to the saints),

[1Cor. 16:16](#) that you also be in subjection to such men and to everyone who helps in the work and labors.

[1Cor. 16:17](#) I rejoice over the coming of Stephanas and Fortunatus and Achaicus, because they have supplied what was lacking on your part.

[1Cor. 16:18](#) For they have refreshed my spirit and yours. Therefore acknowledge such men.

[1Cor. 16:19](#) The churches of Asia greet you. Aquila and Prisca greet you heartily in the Lord, with the church that is in their house.

[1Cor. 16:20](#) All the brethren greet you. Greet one another with a holy kiss.

[1Cor. 16:21](#) The greeting is in my own hand – Paul.

[1Cor. 16:22](#) If anyone does not love the Lord, he is to be accursed. Maranatha.

[1Cor. 16:23](#) The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you.

[1Cor. 16:24](#) My love be with you all in Christ Jesus. Amen.

- I really like Paul's direct commands in vs.13-14
 - Given all that's been said in this letter
 - All the critique, admonishment, correction...
 - Still Paul wants to make sure the church is stirred to walk with the Spirit in confidence, not defeated or discouraged
 - He tells them to be alert
 - To maintain eyes for eternity
 - To recognize the urgency of the times, the needs to remain soberly mindful of their coming judgment
 - To stand firm in the faith
 - To have courage and assurance in what they believe and in WHO they believe

- To act like men, which is to say to be mature in their thinking concerning spiritual things
 - Paul does not mean think like men, not like women
 - He means think like men, not like children
 - The Greeks admired wisdom, so Paul says let's aim for spiritual wisdom
- To be strong
 - The Greeks admired physical strength
 - But Paul says let's aim for spiritual strength
 - A strength built upon spiritual wisdom
- Most of all, act in love
 - The love God showed to us in the face of Christ must become the source for our love to others
 - Self-sacrificial, selfless, intended to unite not divide
- Paul's last instruction involves how the church would receive other leaders in the church who might visit them from time to time
 - Specifically, Paul mentions Stephanas and two other men who come to Corinth
 - This delegation may have accompanied Paul's letter of reply to Corinth
 - Paul sent along these instructions so that as the letter was read, these men have been seen to receive Paul's endorsement
 - These men had proven themselves to Paul, so Paul tells the church to acknowledge these men
 - He wants them to acknowledge their authority
 - Moreover, he wants them to subject themselves to their authority as they ministry to the church
 - Paul's instruction reaffirms that men may be assigned authority in the church and that authority follows them into other congregations

- That's why we say once an elder, always an elder
- But that authority extends from their character and their work ethic, to be committed to devotion to ministry
- Then Paul ends the letter with greetings, intended to unify the church and encourage them to think as a single body geographically distributed across the globe
 - Paul mentioned Aquila and Priscila, the couple that came from Rome to join Paul in ministering in Corinth before leaving with Paul for Ephesus
 - Their home in Corinth had become a house church
 - Now it's clear they were using their house in Ephesus as another church
 - Their model is the ideal model for the church in any day
 - A couple ministering together, devoting their lives to ministry
 - Using their resources for the glory of God
 - Setting up shop wherever the Lord sends them
 - Then Paul extends a general greeting and kiss from all the brethren in Ephesus
 - Paul ends his letter taking the pen from the scribe who wrote on his behalf
 - This one line written in his own hand validated his authorship
 - In the next line, Paul gives a final strong warning to the church
 - That should anyone fail to show love for Christ, then this person is revealing themselves to be accursed
 - They are not a believer, and therefore we must see them as infiltrators in the church
 - Paul finishes the thought with maranatha, which is Aramaic for Oh Lord come
 - Paul writes it here in Aramaic, a language largely unknown in Greek society
 - This tells us that the word had become a Christian expression like Halleluia is today

- Paul ends the letter in a manner similar to the way he started
 - He extends grace to the church, just as he began by saying grace to you
 - No single word better expresses all that Paul taught or all that Christ has done for the church
 - Grace is favor shown without cause or merit
 - The church was called to live according to the grace the Lord extended to them
 - Showing each other favor without cause or merit
 - In doing so, they are showing the love of Christ, as Paul ends
 - The love of Christ be with us all