

The Church of the Servant King

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Survey of the Bible Series – Paul’s First Letter to the Corinthians

(SB_1Cor16)

INTRODUCTION

This chapter may seem unrelated to our needs today, but actually it deals in a very helpful way with three areas of stewardship: money (1 Cor. 16:1-4), opportunities (1 Cor. 16:5-9), and people (1 Cor. 16:10-24). All of these are resources of the local church and they should be the subject of ministry opportunities for believers who have matured in their faith and spiritual walk.

This chapter addresses questions evidently asked by the believers in Corinth because Paul begins his address with the phrase “*now concerning*” (Gr. *peri de* – περι δε) – a phrase that is used to introduce several chapters in the letter (e.g. 7:1, 25; 8:1; 12:1; 16:12 cf. 8:4). Even though this section is fairly non-confrontational, problems related to this collection become the subject of additional exhortation and instruction from Paul in 2 Corinthians.

THE COLLECTION FOR THE SAINTS IN JERUSALEM (16:1-4)

1 Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I directed the churches of Galatia, so do you also. 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. 3 When I arrive, whomever you may approve, I will send them with letters to carry your gift to Jerusalem; 4 and if it is fitting for me to go also, they will go with me.

It is fairly clear from Paul’s opening remarks in this section that the Corinthian Christians had heard about a collection that Paul was organizing for the poor saints in Jerusalem. This was probably related to the request to Paul and Barnabas by James, Peter, and John to remember the poor when they were in Jerusalem (Gal. 2:10; cf. Acts 11:27-30). It is interesting to note that James, the brother of Jesus, wrote his epistle circa A.D. 46 and Paul wrote his letter to the Galatians in A.D. 48-49 – both around the time of the famine in the region. By the time Paul wrote 1 Corinthians (ca. A.D. 56), he and Barnabas had already collected at least one contribution for the believers in Jerusalem from the believers in Antioch – the contribution that is referenced in the Galatians and Acts passages. So, apparently, Paul was now orchestrating another contribution that is the subject of mention here in 1 Corinthians 16.

6 But from those who were of high reputation (what they were makes no difference to me; God shows no partiality)--well, those who were of reputation contributed nothing to me. 7 But on the contrary, seeing that I had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been to the circumcised 8 (for He who effectually worked for Peter in his apostleship to the circumcised effectually worked for me also to the Gentiles), 9 and recognizing the grace that had been given to me, James and Cephas and John, who were reputed to be pillars, gave to me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, so that we might go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised. 10 They only asked us to remember the poor--the very thing I also was eager to do. (Gal 2:6-10)

27 Now at this time some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. 28 One of them named Agabus stood up and began to indicate by the Spirit that there would certainly be a great famine all over the world. And this took place in the reign of Claudius. 29 And in the proportion that any of the disciples had

means, each of them determined to send a contribution for the relief of the brethren living in Judea. 30 And this they did, sending it in charge of Barnabas and Saul to the elders. (Acts 11:27-30)

We do not have any record of the direction Paul provided to the churches in Galatia that is referenced here in verse 1. Paul would have passed through Galatia on his way to Ephesus after his stay in Corinth on his 2nd missionary journey. Paul is writing 1 Corinthians from Ephesus (Acts 18:23).

Sunday, the first day of the week, would have been a natural occasion to put money aside for fellow believers since it was particularly on this day that Christians assembled. Note that Paul did not specify an amount, but they were to give as the Lord had blessed them. Individual responsibility for such specifics in spiritual matters and in relationships with other believers is much more evident during this present dispensation than during the Age of the Jews-Israel. Paul's exhortation encouraged setting aside a little on a frequent and regular basis, so that a major withdrawal from one's account is not required less frequently. Fiscal responsibility requires discipline.

Paul planned to send a representative from each of the contributing churches, or possibly groups of churches, to Jerusalem with the gift. The letters he spoke of may have been letters of introduction from himself since it appears that at this time he did not plan to make this trip himself. Such a procedure would guarantee that the money would arrive safely and that people would perceive the whole project as honest (cf. 2 Cor. 8:21).

Paul was open to the possibility of going to Jerusalem as part of the group if this seemed best. After he wrote this letter he decided to go (Rom 15:25-26) and indeed went (Acts 20:16, 22; 21:17).

25 But now, I am going to Jerusalem serving the saints. 26 For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem. (Rom 15:25-26)

16 For Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus so that he would not have to spend time in Asia; for he was hurrying to be in Jerusalem, if possible, on the day of Pentecost. (Acts 20:16)

17 After we arrived in Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly. (Acts 21:17)

These few verses in 1 Corinthians 16 along with 2 Corinthians 8 & 9 provide guidelines for individual Christians and local churches in regards to giving. The principles Paul advocated were that setting aside funds for giving should be done on a regular basis, with consistency and in response to the Lord's provision materially. Believers should manage finances with integrity – even with regard to how people perceive that finances are being handled.

Notice that Paul made no mention of tithing. Tithing is a method of giving (actually a system of taxation within a theocratic government) that God prescribed for the Israelites under the Mosaic Law. People practiced tithing as an act of worship commonly in the ancient Near East (cf. Gen. 28:22). When considered in the whole, the Mosaic Law really required that the Israelites give back to God about one third of their incomes. The theocratic model of state sponsored religion through taxation of the citizenry is still practiced in such countries as England where a part of the tax revenue is used to support the Church of England. This theocratic model was initially attempted in some of our original colonies and extended beyond finances to many other matters of daily life as well.

Some Christians have argued that since Abraham paid tithes to Melchizedek (Gen.

14:20), tithing antedates the Mosaic Law and is therefore binding on Christians. Personally, I think this simply represents a failure to distinguish between that which can simply serve as an illustration of an amount specified under a different administration (dispensation) and that which is true for believers today in this administration. No amount is specified by Paul and I question the motives of any church leader who attempts to specify an amount for the believer today. Paul clearly indicates that to be an issue between the individual believer and the Lord.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR MORE MINISTRY & PAUL'S TRAVEL PLANS (1 COR 16:5-12)

5 But I will come to you after I go through Macedonia, for I am going through Macedonia; 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. 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. 8 But I will remain in Ephesus until Pentecost; 9 for a wide door for effective service has opened to me, and there are many adversaries. 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. 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. 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.

As indicated in verse 4, Paul's plans were tentative to some extent. He evidently anticipated a return to Corinth at the end of his stay in Ephesus. At the time he wrote 1 Corinthians, Paul planned to take a northerly path from Ephesus, probably around the Aegean Sea or over the Aegean Sea to Macedonia which lay to the north of the Grecian Peninsula where Corinth was and is located. Philippi, Thessalonica and Berea were located in Macedonia.

These tentative plans were later changed and Paul traveled directly from Ephesus to Corinth (2 Cor. 2:1; 12:14; 13:1-2) and returned back to Ephesus (cf. 2 Cor. 2:5-8; 7:12). He would later visit Macedonia and then Corinth (2 Cor. 2:12-13; 7:6-16).

Verses 6-7 – Paul did eventually spend the winter in Corinth, but it was a year later than he originally anticipated – the winter of A.D. 57-58 rather than A.D. 56-57 (cf. Acts 20:2-3; Rom 16:1, 23). His return was prompted by the numerous issues that he addressed in 1 Corinthians. Paul probably desired to follow up on whether the instructions he had provided in his letter had been received properly and were effecting the needed changes.

Verse 8 – Pentecost was celebrated in late May or early June so Paul probably wrote 1 Corinthians in the Spring of the year just prior to Pentecost in A.D. 56. I believe that it is quite possible that the early Christians continued to observe some Jewish traditions, not as a requirement for salvation, but based upon their Christian liberty. I base this opinion upon several observances.

- The Apostle Paul chose to circumcise Timothy (Acts 16:4) in order that Timothy, an uncircumcised half-Jew, might not offend the Jewish people who might not have given a hearing to Paul otherwise.
- Paul certainly did not believe that circumcision was a requirement for salvation.
- Titus, one of Paul's companions, was not circumcised (Gal 2:3).
- Paul took a Nazirite vow on His first journey which required him to leave Ephesus after only a very short stay so that he might arrive in Jerusalem in time for a "feast" – presumably the feast associated with Pentecost (Acts 18:18-21).
- Paul attempted to make peace with the Jews in Jerusalem by overseeing a vow and being purified with men who had taken that vow (Acts 21:15-26).

When viewed holistically, it is quite evident in Scripture that no believer of the present age is required to submit to any Jewish ritual in order to fulfill the Law of Moses and effectively

become a Jew in order to be saved. It is clear that these examples just mentioned are occasions where the liberty of a Christian believer is exercised. Rituals are meaningless for salvation and they are of no real benefit for the believer's spiritual walk; however, should the believer determine that they might be a tool that can be leveraged in order to witness to others and keep a non-essential issue from being made into a stumbling block in that regard, the believer is at liberty to engage.

Verse 9 – Paul stayed in Ephesus for three years on his third missionary journey. Even though Paul had adversaries there, Paul did not regard them to be an indication that God wanted him in a more comfortable and acceptable setting. Evidently, Paul knew that God had work for him to do there regardless.

Verses 10-11 – Paul would send Timothy to the Corinthians and Paul wanted to insure that they did not mistreat him on the basis of his young age. Due to his age, Timothy may have been timid (1 Tim 4:12). Believers are to be respectful toward other believers and demonstrate patience; however, believers are also expected to speak the Truth courageously in love. Timothy was at that awkward age in life where he still respected those older than him to the point that he may have been afraid to confront error head-on or he may not have yet had the seasoning of time to call out the false premises upon which arguments against him were based. Paul's comments were especially important given the Greek emphasis upon speaking ability and physical appearance.

It is possible that Paul's second visit to Corinth was finalized as a result of Timothy's report to Paul. We do know that Paul went directly to Corinth instead of traveling through Macedonia as he had mentioned here in 1 Corinthians 16.

Verse 12 – We do not know who the "brethren" were who were referenced by Paul here. However, Paul had great respect and admiration for Apollos and Paul's relationship with Apollos is insightful given the sectarianism that existed in Corinth that is the subject of chapters 1-4 and that involved some claiming to be "of Apollos." Paul treated such fellow laborers as partners in ministry – not men under his command even though Paul was an Apostle with the authority to command.

CONCLUSION TO 1 CORINTHIANS

13 Be on the alert, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong. 14 Let all that you do be done in love. 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), 16 that you also be in subjection to such men and to everyone who helps in the work and labors. 17 I rejoice over the coming of Stephanas and Fortunatus and Achaicus, because they have supplied what was lacking on your part. 18 For they have refreshed my spirit and yours. Therefore, acknowledge such men. 19 The churches of Asia greet you. Aquila and Prisca greet you heartily in the Lord, with the church that is in their house. 20 All the brethren greet you. Greet one another with a holy kiss. 21 The greeting is in my own hand--Paul. 22 If anyone does not love the Lord, he is to be accursed Maranatha. 23 The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you.

Verses 13-14 – Isn't it interesting that Paul does not instruct these believers to "act on the basis of their feminine side." They are exhorted with military-like terminology. Why? Because Paul knew that we live in a war zone and it is a war zone unlike any other. It is a war where the casualties continue to walk around for a while. It is a war in which agape love is the tactical nuclear weapon. It is a war in which dangers exist inside as well as outside the church body as evidenced by the church in Corinth and even Ephesus (Acts 20:29-30).

29 "I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; 30 and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. (Acts 20:29-30)

The strength of a man and of the Christian is measured in the agape love that the Christian extends towards others. The only way that agape love is extended to others on a consistent basis is when the believer has internalized and is actualizing the truths of Romans 6. The result is a believer who can demonstrate God's power and poise in the midst of adversity. That power and poise is described in the components of the divine power sphere – yieldedness, objectivity, humility, momentum, personal love for God, agape love toward man, perseverance through momentum testing and sharing God's contentment and happiness.

Verses 15-16 – It is obvious that the Corinthians had a ways to go in their spiritual journey towards maturity. They still had problems with authority figures who may not have met their standards – standards that were based on the collective old man thinking and belief systems of all of the individuals in their culture – collective thought that is tantamount to the cosmos. The Greek old-man based standard – ability for beautiful rhetoric and physical appearance. God does not look on the outward appearance only and is certainly more concerned with substance over style and flash.

Stephanus and his family were Paul's first converts in Achaia (1:16). They had given themselves unselfishly to serving the Corinthians. They were probably loyal to Paul and may have been the source from which the apostle received some of his information about conditions in this church.

Status in the world and status in the function of the church are not necessarily corollaries.

Verses 17-18 – Stephanus had recently visited Paul in Ephesus along with Fortunatus and Achaicus. They may have been the ones who carried the questions Paul answered in 1 Corinthians as well as information regarding conditions in the church.