

Now Concerning The Collection

1 Corinthians 16

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One of the reasons Paul wrote 1 Corinthians, as we've discovered, was to answer some questions that they had asked. Just real quick—believe me, it'll be real quick—I'm going to kind of survey review the questions they asked and what Paul dealt with in this first epistle to the Corinthians. First of all, he answered the questions about marriage in chapter 7. They were dealing with the issue of marriage, so he answered their questions. Secondly, he was talking to them about food offered to idols. He dealt with that in chapters 8, 9, and 10. Then, we dealt with the Lord's Supper in chapter 11. They were mistreating the Lord's Supper in the Communion service. Fourthly, the spiritual gifts. We spent several weeks in chapters 12, 13, and 14. We talked about the gifts of the Spirit which they were, again, abusing and there were issues that needed to be corrected. Corinthians is a corrective epistle. Fourthly, there is spiritual gifts; and fifthly, the resurrection, chapter 15, which we just finished last week and dealt with that chapter.

Tonight we move to a new section where there was an issue that Paul had to deal with, and it's discovered in verse 1. Look at it with me. He says, "Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye." Stop right there for a moment. The first four verses deal with the issue of collection for the saints. Paul's talking about giving, and they had questions about giving and the collection for the saints, to the credit of the believers at Corinth that actually asked about giving and about collection and about money.

In the church today there are a lot of people that are turned off to Christianity because there have been an overemphasis on giving and money. I've met more than one person that says, "I don't go to church anymore because all they do is talk about money." I say, "Well, come to Revival. We don't talk about money unless it's in the Bible and we're teaching through the Word of God." I don't actually go out of my way to teach on the subject of money or of giving, but you know the Bible has a lot to say about it. It's really a tragedy that we have had a kind of a blowback from that—abuse on the subject to where people don't want to hear about it or even talk about it. Nine times out of ten, if you turn your television on, the guys that are on tv, all they want to talk about is giving, money, prosperity, and, "If you give to God, God will bless you; but you've got to give to me first, and then God will bless you, if you give to me." The only ones getting rich are the tv preachers, the people listening are getting broke; so the health and wealth gospel is bankrupt, actually. It's not biblically sound, and we need to be careful that we don't fall into that trap.

Again, it's sad when we do say, "Well, I don't want to hear at all about money or what the Bible has to say." We should be open because actually one of the great indicators of where you are at spiritually is your wallet. God wants to transform your heart, your mind, your life, and your wallet, or your bank account or checking account or your savings account. If your Christianity

doesn't affect the way you steward your money, then it's not real Christianity. We need to be good stewards of what God has entrusted to us.

Tonight will not be exhaustive. We'll spend most of our time on the first four verses, but we're going to get a lot of great principles about giving that are so very, very, very important. Paul deals with how to give, how to plan, opportunities God gives us, and how we should work with other believers in the fellowship or in the body of Christ. We should be good stewards of our money, of our opportunity, and good stewards of people.

This chapter is kind of just personal. It's kind of a wrap up. It's not doctrinal, it's not theological, but it's an important practical chapter in the Bible. If you're following me tonight, outlining verses 1-4 deal with the subject of collection for the saints. Let's read that section entirely. "Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye." So, I've taught this to the Galatian churches, and now I want to share it with you in Corinth. Verse 2, "Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come. 3 And when I come, whomsoever ye shall approve by your letters, them will I send to bring your liberality unto Jerusalem. 4 And if it be meet"—right—"that I go also, they shall go with me."

There's an interesting contrast between the end of chapters 15 and the beginning of chapter 16. Let me point it out. Look at chapter 15, verse 58. That chapter closed with, "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord." Paul was speaking about the resurrection. Now, if we believe that there is life beyond the grave, and we believe that one day we will be resurrected—that we will be with God, we'll be in heaven—then we should " . . . be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord." What you believe would affect how you behave, so what better way for us to be stedfast, unmoveable, and always abounding in the work of the Lord then to be generous with what God has entrusted to us, supporting God's work, God's way, for God's glory. We should all be involved in a practical way of supporting financially the work of the Lord and those who are suffering.

The offering that Paul is referring to here for the saints, they're the Jewish believers in Jerusalem. They were going through a time of persecution and opposition and trial because there was a famine in Judea. When Paul traveled around and accepted offerings, he never did for himself or for his ministry. Paul did not even allow churches to support him financially. Only one church supported Paul financially, and that was the church at Philippi when he was in prison. They gave because he had his own rented house as he was there, and they did support him. He talked about that in Philippians where he talks about that you gave to me and I don't have any need, "But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus." Paul labored with his own hands. He was a tentmaker.

Actually, many times the false teachers that would oppose Paul, one of the accusations they brought against him was, "He knows he's not a real apostle, that's why he doesn't ask for money. If he were a real apostle, he'd ask for money or let you support him." What insanity is

that? If he was a true man of God he'd ask for money? The opposite is true. Paul only gathered collection in this context for the poor saints of Jerusalem, which is interesting. That was the mother church. That was the church where Christianity started, the believers in Jerusalem, and they went out to the Gentile territories in Greece, Macedonia, and southern Greece, Achaia. Actually, they were the missionary churches that were actually sending, back to the mother church, support. It's kind of a reverse of what we have today where we have the church sending money to missionaries. The mission churches were sending money back to the main church. Paul was collecting that from Gentile churches for the Jewish believers in Jerusalem so that they would be knit together as one church, brothers in Christ, and that the Gentile church would show their debt and their love to the Jews by supporting them during this difficult and trying time.

So, verse 1, “. . . the collection for the saints”—is a reference to the church in Jerusalem, and these are Jewish Christians who were in need of help, so Paul took collections everywhere he traveled and made sure the money was sent to Jerusalem. He would go himself or he would make sure that it was sent by the hands of some trustworthy servant himself. He says to them, and the NIV translates it this way, verse 1, “Do what I told the Galatian churches to do.” In 2 Corinthians 8 and 9 Paul gives great detailed information about what he taught the churches of Galatia to do in the way of their giving. So, the collection was for poor saints.

I'm going to give you a series of principles on giving from these four verses. It's a little detailed. I want you to listen carefully. I believe the points will appear on the screen, but I want you to see them in the Bible; they're taken from the text itself. What are some of the principles we learn from Paul's instruction on giving? Here's the first: Giving should be an act of worship. It should be part of a worshiping heart. It should be an act of worship and part of our worship service. The Christians gathered to worship on Sunday, this is the first day of the week, and it was part of that resurrection day that they celebrated, that they were to gather together and give to God.

So, when we gather together on Sunday, or whatever day it is, we worship in song, we worship in prayer, we worship in giving, we worship in praying, and we also worship, too, in preaching or teaching the Bible. Did you know that your listening to the Scriptures—how you listen, how you respond to the Word of God—is part of your act of worship? So, you're to be listening as a worshiper. You're to be obeying the Word of the Lord. As the Bible is read and the Bible is expounded, you should be saying, “Here am I, Lord, send me. Your servant is listening,” bowing down to the authority of God's Word. It should be a part of our Christian worship. Nothing wrong with coming to church and having a time when we give to God out of the blessings and the abundance that He has provided for us. Giving was part of their worship. It should be part of our worship as well. To bring a generous gift to the Lord is part of our worship.

In 2 Corinthians 9:7, the Scripture tells us that it should be done from our heart, and it should be done willingly and joyfully. You should never, ever be pressured or coerced to give to God. You shouldn't be given a guilt trip. You shouldn't be pressured. You shouldn't be coerced, neither should you be pressured or coerced to sing to the Lord or to pray to the Lord. It should

always come from the heart because that's what God is looking at. God looks at the heart.

Here's another principle: Giving should be centered in the church. It should be primarily in and through and centered in the church. This is basically a principle that is derived from the text when in verse 2 Paul says, "Upon the first day of the week"—so they had switched their day of worship from Saturday, which was the seventh day, to Sunday, which was the day of new beginnings. They were worshiping on Sunday because that was the Lord's day when He rose from the dead. Just a little footnote there that they did begin to worship on Sunday, not on Saturday any longer as a Sabbath.

What do I mean by "centered in the church"? There are what is referred to as parachurch organizations—missions, other organizations—that aren't a local church that many times church members will give money to and support and give to. That's perfectly fine, but God has ordained the church, and if you give only to a parachurch organization or to others outside when you're watching your favorite evangelist or speaker on tv and you want to support their ministry, that's fine, but your giving should be primarily at your church where you're getting fed, you're getting taught, you're getting mentored, you're getting disciplined, you are serving, you are one with the body, you're a part of the body. You should be giving primarily and first of all to your local church.

Billy Graham used to, many times as he would preach in his crusades, he would actually say, "First we want to make sure that you're giving to your church and you're going to church on Sunday. You do that before you give to our ministry." Which is the right perspective. But I just wanted to mention that the church is the work of God today in the world. Jesus said, ". . . I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."

You might say, "Well, you're a pastor of the local church, no wonder you would make that very clear." But it's true. Jesus died for the Church. He bled and died. He's coming back for the Church, the bride. It's so important that we have a church, we give to the work of the church, and that the church then gives to other ministries and the fruit goes out. It's not saying you don't give outside the church, but you should make the center focus of your giving your local church that you are a part of. This is another reason why every Christian should be a committed member of a local church. We don't have formal membership, but if you attend the church, if you give to this church, if you pray for this church, you serve in this church, you submit to the leadership of this church, you are a member of this church fellowship and this congregation. So, it gives you that opportunity to share what God has provided for you.

We do outreaches as well. God is using the church here at Revival to do a lot of outreach, and the ministry of the Word of God, the radio ministry, the missionaries we support. Your giving here goes to many different ways we reach out.

Here's the third: Giving should be done by every member of the congregation. It says in verse 2, ". . . let every one of you,"—he didn't say just some of you or the deeper life club or the super spiritual or you that have a lot of money or you that just like to give away money, it's—"every

one of you”—it should be done by everyone. Even our children in Children’s Ministry should bring their quarters and their nickels and their dimes and learn to give to God, learn to be good stewards of giving to God and to God’s work. Paul makes it clear, “. . . let every one of you”—rich or poor.

Remember what was known as the widow’s mite? When Jesus was at the court of the women and He “. . . saw the rich men casting their gifts into the treasury.” He saw this poor little widow. She put in her two little mites, and Jesus said, “I want you to know that this woman has put in more money than everyone else.” That just blew them away, no doubt. How could that be? Jesus said, “Because she has given of her poverty.” The King James uses the word “penury.” It means her poverty. She gave everything she had. It wasn’t the amount. God does not look at the amount, God looks at the heart. God looks at how much you keep back, not how much you give, and how much sacrifice is involved in your giving.

Giving should be consistent and systematic. Look at verse 2 again. It uses the phrase, “. . . lay by him in store . . .” Literally, that means keep putting aside and saving. I believe that you should actually think and plan and commit to a regular giving and that you do it not just kind of haphazardly or spontaneously or impromptu, but as you kind of go over your budget and how much you want to spend where, you always have a little section there where we give to God and to God’s work and to the ministry of God and His Word being preached. So, you, “. . . lay by him in store”—you set it aside, be consistent, be systematic, be organized, or thoughtful and planned out, some translations have.

Here’s the fifth principle: Giving should be proportionate. Notice verse 2, “. . . as God hath prospered him . . .” If God has blessed you with a lot of money, how can you not give back to God. Again, it’s not the amount, it’s the heart. But if God has blessed you proportionately...I get asked the question a lot of times about tithing, and this should be a whole sermon in itself. I hesitate to even mention it because whenever I do I get someone mad or someone upset or I get someone angry, and so be it. I don’t know what else to do but be faithful to what I believe the Bible teaches. Let me just say, nowhere does Paul the apostle in the New Testament ever teach us tithing. As a matter of fact, he never used the word.

I believe that tithing was an Old Testament concept for Israel. Can it be adopted by an individual in the new covenant? Yes, no problem. But is it required? Is it mandatory? Is it a law that we must keep, that we must give ten percent? And then people wonder, “Well, is it ten percent of my gross income or my net income? How do you work that out?” and we feel like it becomes so legalistic. I think the Bible is pretty clear that in the New Testament whenever the Scriptures were taught it doesn’t teach that you have to give ten percent. It’s between you and God.

Some people are getting upset with me right now; some people are going, “Praise Jesus! I love this preaching. This is amazing! Thank God, I love it.” It doesn’t mean you’re free that you don’t have to give, but it means that you don’t do it out of legal obligation. It’s not a legal obligation. Nor does the New Testament teach that we must worship on Saturday or the

Sabbath day. It doesn't teach that. Now, if you want to say it's a good rule of thumb to give ten percent, whatever you want to do, that's great, that's between you and God; but it's not obligatory. It's not taught in the New Testament. Wherever it's mentioned in the New Testament it's taken for granted that the Jews tithed, and it's just not didactic, it's not doctrinal, it's not teaching that we should be giving ten percent.

Ray Stedman spoke about this. He said, "The proportion is to be based on your awareness of how much God has given you and how much your heart has been stirred by the gifts and the grace of God." I love that. We need to realize that it's not, "Okay, I give God ten percent and the rest is mine to do whatever I want." Did you know that it all belongs to God? Some of you are going, "Awww, I was digging on this teaching until you said that." It all belongs to God, so you should be praying over your finances about, "What would You want me to do, God?" It's fine to take care of your retirement, it's fine to have insurance, it's fine to lay up in store for your children, but you should all be thinking in perspective of stewardship. Everything we have belongs to God.

Sometimes we think, Well, this is Yours, God; the rest is mine. I'll do what I want with it. I heard the story about a little boy whose mom gave him two quarters. She wanted to teach him about giving to God, so she gave him two quarters and said, "One is for the Lord, you give it in Sunday school in the offering; the other is for yours to keep and to do what you want with." He takes off for church and that day he trips as he was walking on the sidewalk. One of the quarters flew out of his hand and went into the gutter and was lost. He said, "Oh, that's a bummer! I just lost the Lord's quarter." Do you know the one that gets lost is always the Lord's quarter, "Too bad, Lord! That was a bummer! Lost it." We need to realize that all belongs to God.

Here's the sixth (I hope I'm following my numbers right). Giving should not be done under pressure. I want you to notice in verse 2 Paul uses that phrase, " . . . that there be no gatherings when I come." This is interesting. Paul doesn't say anything more about it, but he said, "When I get there, I don't want to be talking about money. When I get there, I don't want to be messing around with offerings and all that. I want you to get it all taken care of so that when I come it's going to be ready to be sent to the believers there in Judea and in Jerusalem." It actually should be done not under pressure with Paul breathing down your neck and looking at how much you give.

A personal policy of mine, and always has been, is I have no idea who gives what to this church. I never ever, ever get that information. I never look for that information, and I never care to know that information. I do not know who gives what so that I can minister to everyone equally. I don't pray with you more fervently if you're a big giver or ignore you if you don't give because I have no idea. It's something that I've stayed away from. So, giving should not be done under pressure with the pastor coercing or pressuring you. It should be between you and God.

Here's the seventh: Gifts given must be handled honestly. Now, we finally move to verses 3

and 4, and trust me, we will get through the chapter tonight. Trust me. God's gifts given must be handled honestly. The church is not a business, but it should be run businesslike. I've served on a lot of boards in other congregations and many times they're not really careful on how they handle the church's finances. They don't take care to handle it properly, and they even follow the law in how they handle that money.

Notice verses 3 and 4. Paul says, "And when I come, whomsoever ye shall approve by your letters"—so, I want you to decide who's going to oversee the money, who's going to take care of the money, who's going to count the money and be accountable to the church—"them will I send to bring your liberality"—which is your gift—"unto Jerusalem." So, you as a church, you pick out your spiritual leaders to oversee this giving, and we'll send them with the money to the churches in Jerusalem.

Notice verse 4, "And if it be meet"—right—"that I go also, they shall go with me." It was handled with care; it was handled appropriately. It should be a mark of spirituality how an individual and how a church deals with finances. The church leader should pray, seek God, and always keep eternal values and the glory of God in perspective when we use the Lord's money for the Lord's work. We're not just using it, we're investing it in eternal things.

Here's my second main point, and we'll move a little faster, verses 5-9. Paul talks about how he planned and how he scheduled his plans—how he kind of stewarded his time and the will of God and opportunities that God gave him. This is kind of a personal wrap up in this last chapter where he talks about his travel plans and who he's serving with and when he's coming and going. Verses 5-9, he says, "Now I will come unto you, when I shall pass through Macedonia: for I do pass through Macedonia." Most likely, there were false teachers who were saying, "Paul left, and he ain't coming back." Paul's trying to say, "No, I will come back," and they were using that as ammunition against Paul saying he didn't love you, he doesn't care, he's gone.

Verse 5, "Now I will come unto you, when I shall pass through Macedonia"—Macedonia is northern Greece where Paul had established many churches, one of them being the church of Philippi. He says, ". . . for I do pass through Macedonia. 6 And it may be"—notice his statement, it may be. He's not certain. He doesn't know for sure what God's plan is going to be or which way the Lord will lead him. "And it may be that I will abide, yea, and winter with you, that ye may bring me on my journey whithersoever I go. 7 For I will not see you now by the way; but I trust to tarry a while with you"—and then he says—"if the Lord permit." He says, "It may be,"—"ye may bring me on my journey . . . if the Lord permit"—or if it's God's will—"But I will tarry at Ephesus until Pentecost. 9 For a great door and effectual"—or opportunity—"is opened unto me, and there are many adversaries."

Again, there are some lessons and principles we can draw from what Paul says in these verses. In these verses Paul discusses his travel plans. I found great encouragement that Paul didn't have a five-year plan, a ten-year plan. He wasn't sure which way the Spirit would lead him or guide him, so he was kind of just wanting to be led by the Spirit not too much committing

himself so that God could lead him and guide him. I think there's some wisdom in that. Yes, have a five-year plan, but our plans need to be in God's hands, right?

In the book of James, "Go to now, ye that say, To day or to morrow we will go into such a city . . . buy and sell, and get gain"—you don't know what a day may bring forth—"For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that." I laugh sometimes when I meet people that say, "We're going to do this," and "We're going to do that, and we're going to do this and we're going to do that." I don't always say it but I think to myself, You may be dead tomorrow, I just thought I'd encourage you. You don't know. Paul just says, "If the Lord wills. I don't know. I'll wait and see what God has."

Let me give you some of these principles. First, Paul's goals were short-range. He wanted God to lead him and to guide him. Secondly, Paul was flexible in his plans and his commitments. Again, verses 6-7, "And it may . . . ye may . . . but I trust . . . if the Lord"—wills. Ray Stedman said, "How gloriously indefinite," I love that. How gloriously indefinite—trusting the Lord to guide and to lead the way we should to. Thirdly, Paul believed that God would provide as he journeyed. Verse 6, " . . . that ye may bring me on my journey." In the NIV it translates, " . . . help me on my journey" So, I'm trusting God for His direction, I'm trusting God for His provision that you are going to be used by God to help me on the journey that I take. We need to venture in faith. God will provide, but it doesn't always come all at once. We want God to lay out our whole life in front of us, then we'll say, "Okay, Lord, I trust You." God says, "Take one step at a time."

Here's the fourth, Paul used wisdom in his planning, and he used what we would call common sense. Look at verse 8. He says, "But I will tarry at Ephesus until Pentecost." Back in verse 6 he mentioned that he would winter there with them, but he realized actually that it would be a difficult time to sail on the Mediterranean Sea, so he says, "I'm going to stay until after Pentecost," and he wanted to be there during that time so probably Paul wrote this epistle in the fall or winter of A.D. 55. Basically, he's using good common sense, "I don't think I should be sailing until after Pentecost," and it's just kind of using wisdom that God gives us.

Verse 9, I love this verse. Paul says the reason, "For a great door"—so, I'm going to stay in Ephesus until Pentecost because God has opened a great door and an opportunity—"is opened unto me, and there are many adversaries." You'll want to look at this verse. It's super important, " . . . there are many adversaries." Paul went to Ephesus and there had a great opportunity. He spent quite a few weeks there at the School of Tyrannus teaching the Word of God and many believed. A revival broke out in Ephesus to where there were so many people coming to Jesus that they weren't worshiping the false goddess Diana any longer, which was who the Ephesians worshiped, so they weren't buying the little silver shrines or statues of Diana.

Demetrius and the silversmith guys who were selling the little statues of Diana, got together and caused a riot. Paul was arrested and taken into the amphitheater. You can visit it today. It's a big giant twenty-thousand seat amphitheater in Ephesus beautifully restored. They began to chant, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians. Great is Diana of the Ephesians. Great is Diana of

the Ephesians,” and they began to worship their own hands, the making of their own gods with their own hands. But there were many Christians that came to Christ while Paul was there ministering in Ephesus, so he calls it, “. . . a great door . . .”

We use that phrase for when God opens a door of opportunity to do ministry, and that’s what we want, right? Where we want to serve the Lord? We want God to open that door. We want God to give us opportunity to preach, to serve, to minister, to love other people, to share the gospel. So, God opened that door for Paul.

But I want you to notice what else was happening, “. . . and there are many adversaries.” Wherever there is opportunity, there will be opposition. Write that down. Wherever there is opportunity, there will be opposition. I say that because a lot of times Christians say, “Lord, I want to serve You,” and they start serving the Lord. God begins to open a door, and they’re serving the Lord. Then, the minute they start serving the Lord, guess what happens? Satan starts to attack them; Satan starts to oppose them. They get discouraged, they get fainthearted, and they give up and quit. There is no opportunity without opposition. If you’re serving God and you’re not being opposed, you’re probably not in the will of God. When you’re doing God’s will, God’s way, for God’s glory, I just want to encourage you, Satan will go after you. But you can rejoice, it means that you’re being effective.

If the devil leaves you alone...someone said, “The devil never kicks the devil,” it means that you’re not causing him any problems. If the devil’s after you, you’re on track. You’re going for it. You’re being used of God for the glory of God. Don’t be discouraged, and don’t get this false kind of idea that, “Oh, serving Jesus, yes it’s a blessing; yes, it’s a joy; yes, it’s wonderful,” but it brings you into opposition of the enemy. False teachers followed Paul, Satan attacked Paul. He was always dealing with opposition. So, wherever there is an opportunity, verse 9, there’s always going to be an adversary. God’s will can be difficult and can be hard. It’s so very important.

Here’s section three of our text, verses 10-19. In this section, Paul talks about how he was working and cooperating with other believers and other servants of the Lord. So, in your work with the Lord, not only opportunities bring opposition, but also you’re serving with other people. You can’t serve the Lord alone. You have to learn to work together with other people in the Lord. Paul was not only a great evangelist, soul winner, he was a friend maker, and he worked together with other people to get the gospel out.

Let me mention them for you. First, Timothy, his son in the faith, verses 10-11. Paul says, “Now if Timotheus come, see that he may be with you without fear: for he worketh the work of the Lord, as I also do. 11 Let no man therefore despise him: but conduct him forth in peace, that he may come unto me: for I look for him with the brethren.” Timothy is one of my favorite New Testament characters. He was led to the Lord by the Apostle Paul, and he became his son in the faith. Paul, writing about him in Philippians 2, said, “For I have no man likeminded”—which means actually a kindred spirit or single soul. They were one soul in two bodies. He had a kindred spirit. Timothy was known to be young, and he was very timid, naturally shy. This is

why Paul wrote to him and said, “For God hath not given us the spirit of fear”—which is the word ‘timidity’—“but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.” So, don’t be afraid, don’t be timid, and he was young.

It’s a challenge when you’re young and you’re preaching to people twice your age or much older than you. When I first started teaching the Bible, I was 20 years old, and I remember as our little fellowship was growing some people in their 30s showed up, and I freaked out. I thought, There’s old people here tonight. Then, there were some in their 40s and older. But when I was young, it was kind of intimidating for me. When we started Sunday mornings in 1977, and I’m like 24 or 25 years of age, and older people started coming to the church, I would get up to preach and they’d say, “When’s the pastor show up? That must be the youth pastor.” No, that’s the senior pastor.

Timothy was timid and shy, so Paul’s encouraging him. You know, “We’ve got to work together. Timothy’s a great servant of the Lord. See that you help him. Work with him in the Lord as I do.” “Let no man therefore despise him: but conduct him forth in peace, that he may come unto me: for I look for him with the brethren.”

The second person Paul worked with was Apollos, verses 12-14. Remember Apollos was one of the eloquent preachers that the Corinthians liked because of his oratory skills and his great knowledge. He says, “As touching our brother Apollos, I greatly desired him to come unto you with the brethren”—I wanted him to come to you there in Corinth—“but his will was not at all to come at this time; but he will come when he shall have a convenient time.” Here’s an interesting thought. Paul was an apostle. He could’ve, with his authority, ordered Apollos to go to Corinth, but instead he respected his own walk with the Lord and did not pressure or coerce him. Good leaders don’t try to lord over other individuals, so he said, verse 13, “Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong”—or be strong like men. Verse 14, “Let all your things be done with charity”—in love. Again, he’s encouraging them to be awake, be alert, don’t get intoxicated by the world. Stay spiritually awake and alert. Stand firm. “. . . stand fast in the faith,”—which is the body of truth that we believe as Christians.

The second individual are those who are in the house of Stephanas, and Paul had spoken earlier in Corinthians about having “. . . baptized also the household of Stephanas: besides, I know not whether I baptized any other.” Verse 15, “I beseech you, brethren, (ye know the house of Stephanas, that it is the firstfruits of Achaia”—in other words, these are the first converts in southern Greece—“and that they have addicted themselves”—this is my King James, other translations have they are devoted—“to the ministry of the saints,) 16 That ye submit yourselves unto such, and to every one that helpeth with us, and laboureth.”

Now, if you’ve got to have an addiction, this is a good addiction—addict to yourself to the ministry of the saints. You just love to serve, you love to encourage others, you’re just devoted or addicted to serving others.

In verse 17 Paul talks about the messengers of the church at Corinth that came to him, by the

way, he's most like writing this from Ephesus, so he's speaking of them coming to him. "I am glad of the coming of Stephanas and Fortunatus and Achaicus: for that which was lacking on your part they have supplied." They sent these men to Paul with probably the questions that they had. They also may be the ones who carried the letter back from Paul to the church in Corinth.

Verse 18, I love it, "For they have refreshed my spirit and yours: therefore acknowledge ye them that are such." Don't you love those believers that God brings into your life that whenever you see them it puts a smile on your face? It refreshes your heart. You don't want to be a person that discourages people or they run from, you want to be someone that they're so glad to see you, that you're a refreshment, you're a joy, you're a blessing, you're an encouragement. So, Paul was not alone.

Verse 19, Paul mentions the husband and wife team, Aquila and Priscilla. "The churches of Asia salute you." He includes all the churches in Asia Minor. He says, "Aquila and Priscilla salute you much in the Lord, with the church that is in their house." What a great thing when a husband and wife can serve the Lord together. Amen? They can pray together, they can serve together, they can be used by the Lord together. They can have their separate ministries, but this husband and wife team were tentmakers and evidently they were able to buy a house or pay for a house large enough to actually have a church in their house. What a blessing as the early church met in homes. It's so very important that they gather together. They didn't own property, but they met in homes.

So, you have Timothy, Apollos, the household of Stephanas, the messengers of the church, verses 17-18. Now, look at verses 20-24. We here have Paul's closing remarks. He wraps up this entire letter. First is the greeting, verses 20-21, "All the brethren greet you. Greet ye one another with an holy kiss. 21 The salutation of me Paul with mine own hand." This "holy kiss" today would be a holy handshake or a holy hug or whatever. Now, you can kiss if you want, but it was kind of the middle eastern or European kiss on the two cheeks where even men kiss men on cheeks. There's a couple of men in our church that kiss me often on the cheek after service, and it's a holy kiss.

What it's telling us is that we should welcome one another, reach out to one another, that we should love one another and reach out to one another. If you come to this church on a regular basis, you see someone new that's here for the first time or someone you haven't met, reach out to them. Give them a holy handshake or a holy hug in the Lord.

Now, Paul says, verse 21, "This salutation of me Paul with mine own hand,"—that's because Paul would dictate his letters. He used an amanuensis, and then at the end of the letter he would take the pen from his amanuensis and sign his own name to authenticate that it was a Pauline epistle.

Verse 22, Paul gives us a warning, "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maranatha." What a beautiful word that is, "Maranatha."

There were false teachers in Corinth, and the Bible says that if you “. . . love not the Lord Jesus Christ,”—you’re opposing Him, you’re against Him, you’re a false teacher or you don’t know the Lord and love the Lord, that you are already condemned. Jesus didn’t come to condemn, He came to save. But if you reject Him, the consequences of that are your inevitable condemnation or your destruction. So, a neat description in my thought of a Christian is one who loves Jesus Christ. What a great way to describe a Christian, “I love Jesus.” Do you love Jesus tonight? And, if you’re a born-again believer in Jesus, He’s put His love in your heart for Him, and so you love the Lord.

Now, the word, “Anathema,” is actually a Greek word. It means that you are cursed to the lowest hell. The word “Maranatha” is an Aramaic word, and it means come Lord Jesus or the Lord come. I think it’s a word that we should revive. Back in the Jesus People days we had it on bumper stickers, on t-shirts. We had Maranatha music and we would say, “Maranatha,” to one another because it’s a reminder that the Lord is coming, and we need to keep that perspective—the Lord’s coming.

Then, Paul closes with a blessing, verses 23-24, “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. 24 My love be with you all in Christ Jesus. Amen.” Notice how Paul closes the epistle, grace and love. This church at Corinth was anything but perfect, but Paul loved them just the same, and Paul was committed to them just the same, and Paul prayed for them and asked God to give them His grace and His love. So, we must love the brethren; and if you’re going to serve the Lord, there’s going to be opposition but you don’t serve the Lord alone, you learn to work together with other believers in the service to the Lord. You also give the substance that God has entrusted to you to God as unto a faithful Creator. Amen?