



1 CORINTHIANS

1 CORINTHIANS 16:1-24

INTRODUCTION

Having addressed the major issues and questions of the Corinthian church, Paul brings his letter to a close with instructions regarding the collection for the Jerusalem church, his own travel plans, and personal greetings.

MAIN POINT

The gospel enables us to work hard for the good of others, both in providing material needs and spiritual needs.

REFLECT

Most of Paul's letters end with some sort of final greetings (Welcome these people; So and So sends you their greetings, etc.). In some books such as Ephesians, these "housekeeping" sections are quite brief. Here in 1 Corinthians, this comprises the whole final chapter! That can make this chapter difficult to read, but in it we're given a window into Paul's heart for others which in turn provides us with a standard to live up to in our own lives.

First off, we see Paul's *concern for the poor and for church unity* (vv. 1-4). The Jewish "mother church" in Jerusalem was very poor, possibly still suffering the effects of the famine prophesied in Acts 11:27-30. Paul had been organizing a relief fund for them from the churches he had founded on his missionary journeys, Corinth being one of them. In addition to providing financial relief, Paul was hoping that the contribution from these churches would demonstrate solidarity between Jewish and Gentile Christians.

Secondly, we see Paul's *affection for this church* (vv. 5-12). Gathering the collection for the church in Jerusalem meant traveling to all the churches who had agreed to contribute. While Paul was content to visit most of those churches only briefly, he wanted to spend the winter with the Corinthians (vv. 6-7). Until then he's been content to send his beloved Timothy to them (vv. 10-11). He even tried to get Apollos to go as well (v. 12). Evidently the Corinthians had been asking for their favorite preacher to return, and rather than be jealous they weren't asking for him, Paul encouraged it! Paul's love for this church is evident both in his desire to spend time with them and in his willingness to part with such useful ministers for their sake.

Finally, Paul's affection for this troublesome church demonstrates his *commitment to them* (vv. 13-24). This letter is a response to reports Paul had heard about the church and to a letter they had written to him. He received these reports and this letter when visited by Stephanas and his household in Ephesus. Upon these men's arrival, Paul became aware of just how divided and immoral the Corinthian church was, that they preferred other teachers to himself, and that some even doubted his authority as an apostle.

And yet Stephanas' visit- so far from angering Paul with the negative report- "made up for [the Corinthians'] absence" (v. 17). You could say that Paul had a Corinth-shaped hole in his heart that was filled by this visit! Despite all the ways he has had to correct them, Paul was "refreshed" to hear news from Corinth. Their sins did not diminish his love for them, but rather moved him to put his love into action.

In this sense, Paul is simply practicing what he preached (or rather wrote) in chapter 13. All of the Corinthians' problems could be traced back to a failure to love one another as they had been loved by Christ. Hence Paul's reminder to do all things in love (v. 14) and his warning against those who don't (v. 22). Paul's love for this messy church is impossible to miss in this final chapter and serves as a model for us today of how to love others with Christ-like love.

- If you were the one writing a letter to this church, what would your tone be? What enables Paul to express such affection and gratitude for this messy church?
- Who in your own life do you find difficult to love? What lessons can we learn from Paul's example of loving this church?
- What practical needs exist around you that your community group can contribute to?

MEMORIZE

1 Corinthians 16:14 – *"Let all that you do be done in love."*