

COLLECTIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

1 CORINTHIANS 16:1-24

How do you conclude a letter?

What's your salutation of choice?

If you're looking for a formal sign-off you might write, "sincerely" or "best wishes" or "respectfully yours..." For a casual closing why not, "cheers" or "take care" or "peace out..." For a more intimate windup you can try, "yours truly" or "love always" or even "hugs and kisses."

Well, in chapter 16 Paul wraps up his instructive letter to the church at Corinth with a salutation or two.

For fifteen chapters now the apostle has been addressing problems in this church... He's rebuked the Corinthians for their divisiveness. There were divisions and schisms among them... He's called out blatant immorality in their midst and demanded they exercise church discipline... He reprimanded church members for suing each other in secular courts... Paul cleared up the church's confusion over marriage, and divorce, and singleness... He addressed the issue of meat sacrificed to idols, and the broader subject of Christian liberty...

Then, Paul took up matters relating to the public meetings of the church... male and female roles... the Lord's Supper... finding your place in the Body and spiritual gifts... even speaking in tongues... And of course, he spoke of the supremacy of love. "I could remove mountains, but (if I) have not love, I am nothing."

In a sense, reading 1 Corinthians is like climbing a mountain. *From chapters 1-14 you scale upwards from ledge to ledge. In Chapter 15 you reach the summit...*

Paul trumpets the gospel and Jesus' resurrection. He also discusses resurrection in general - the importance and mechanics of the transformation of our bodies...

But once you reach the summit, you've got to come down. And that's what Paul does in this morning's text.

In Chapter 16 he ends this rangy and rambling letter to the believers in Corinth with a series of conclusions.

One commentator titles this chapter, "[Needs, news, and notes.](#)" It's Paul's salutation. And he begins his *conclusion* with some instructions about a *collection*...

Verse 1, "[Now concerning the collection for the saints...](#)" Realize Paul had been taking an offering from the Gentile churches for the first church in Jerusalem.

The Jewish Christians had fallen on hard times.

The whole region of Judea was suffering a famine that had left many people hungry and homeless.

Remember too, in the early chapters of Acts the first believers sold all that they had and pooled their resources. They were so caught up in love for one another that they put personal stewardship aside and thought only about each other's welfare. Though this was *prompted by God's love*, it was never *presented as God's will*. It may not have been the wisest move. Perhaps it created some financial hardships later on.

There were two other factors that motivated Paul to take up this offering... Paul knew the Gentile Christians owed the original Jewish church a debt of gratitude.

It was thanks to the boldness of those Galilean fishermen that the Gospel got off the ground. In face of danger they proclaimed the news of the resurrection.

It was also the leaders in Jerusalem that recognized God was doing a new work in the world. That Jesus offered salvation apart from the Law. You didn't have to first become a Jew to earn God's acceptance.

Righteousness in Christ is by faith and faith alone. This meant grace for every race. It opened the door to an avalanche of Gentiles pouring into God's kingdom.

Churches were springing up all across the Gentile world, and they all could trace their spiritual heritage back to Jerusalem. Since they owed the Jews their salvation, *why not help them out with some groceries?*

And this offering would also go a long way toward building a bridge between Jew and Gentile Christians.

Actually, in Christ there was no longer such a thing as Jew and Gentile. In Christ we're one, no matter our race or culture. The walls of division have been broken down. In Christ, we are one new man - a third race.

This was a spiritual reality, but Paul knew it would be re-enforced and made tangible by this special offering.

And there was one more very personal reason Paul collected this benevolence for the Jerusalem church...

I'm sure he was feeling personally responsible for the fiscal challenges they faced. *Why was the church at Jerusalem saddled with so many widows to feed?*

It might've been because an angry rabbi named Saul had persecuted them. *Paul, who was previously this Saul*, had confiscated their possessions, incarcerated them, even murdered some of the Jerusalem believers.

No wonder he now wants to do what he can to help these believers in need. *He collects an offering...*

Paul continues, **“As I have given orders to the churches of Galatia, so you must do also...”**

This wasn't just Paul's appeal in Corinth, in all the Gentile churches he gathered this collection... Here he mentions **Galatia** - churches in Iconium, Lystra, Derbe.

The **Syrian** church at Antioch also added to this collection... As did churches in **Asia**... And the **Macedonian** churches of Thessalonica and Philippi...

It was only right that the church in **Corinth** contribute to this cause and help out their Jewish brothers.

In verse 2, he tells them how to proceed. **“On the first day of the week...”** This is a detail with provocative implications... For centuries true believers met on the last day of the week, Saturday, the holy Sabbath.

But now the early Christians abandon 1500 years of tradition and meet on **“the first day of the week”** or Sunday. *What would cause such a monumental shift?*

It should be obvious, the resurrection of Jesus was on the first day of the week. To commemorate His resurrection, Christians began to gather on Sunday.

And when the church gathers, Paul commands, “Let each one of you lay something aside...” The Greek word translated “collection” in verse 1 is **logia**. It refers to an “extra collection” - one that’s not required.

In the Scriptures *the tithe* belongs to the Lord. The first fruits of your income is not your money. It’s God’s property. You steal from Him if you keep it for yourself.

The Prophet Malachi asked the people in his day, “Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed Me! But you say, “In what way have you robbed Me?” And he answers them, “In tithes and offerings.” By holding back their regular offering they were robbing God.

Realize, this is not a big deal because God needs our money. It’s that we need to give to God. Giving financially to God gives tangible expression to my faith.

It takes faith out of the theoretical and makes it real.

The tithe is a discipline that my faith needs. It honors God on a regular, weekly basis. It reminds me that I am dependent NOT on the job, or on the boss, but on God.

Once a little girl had just learned to tie her shoes. She started to cry. Her father asked, “*why the tears?*”

She said, “*Because I now can tie my shoes.*” He said, “*But honey, it’s not hard, and now you know how.*”

She answered, “Yes, I know, but I just realized I’m now going to have to do this for the rest of my life.”

This is true of a believer’s giving. *Not that we cry over it*, but that it’s consistent and regular. Joyful giving is part of a Christian’s discipleship. It’s essential to our spiritual growth. Without it, our faith will be stunted.

Yet here, Paul is not talking about the Corinthians’ regular offering that went to support the ministry of the local church - this was an “*extra collection*” taken to provide relief for hungry believers in a far-away place.

I don’t think some of us realize the difference between *our tithe or regular giving* - and a *special or extra collection*. Frankly, we see this at Calvary...

From time to time we think it appropriate to highlight a special need that’s worthy of your support - *hurricane relief, or feeding the poor, or mission work in Trinidad...*

Here’s our dilemma, whenever we spotlight a special ministry beyond the four walls of our church, we overshadow the local needs, and the offerings earmarked for Calvary Chapel can get shortchanged.

As a church what good does it do for us to give overseas if we can’t meet our obligations at home?

This happens, and the answer is to understand the difference between *regular giving* and *extra collections*.

It’s like the cartoon. The elder is speaking to the pastor, “Sorry pastor, the bad news is we voted down your cost-of-living raise. But the good news is you are now eligible for assistance from the Food Pantry.”

This hasn't happened to me - *it's a joke* - but it could if we don't distinguish between *regular* and *extra* giving

In January 2012 CNN reported on an event in Atlanta where 42,000 college students gathered to worship God and raise funds to stop human trafficking. Their goal was a million dollars. CNN was impressed. One camera captured a fellow pulling \$50 out of his wallet.

But let's put this into context... Imagine, two 20-something aged men... One of them is a student. He works part-time, and lives on an allowance his parents provide. He goes to this event and feels led by God to donate \$50 to a worthy cause. CNN applauds him...

Pardon the expression, but this is **glam-giving**. He sees where his money goes, and folks see him give it.

But there's another guy, fresh out of school, working a job that pays a modest \$36,000 a year. This guy tithes - gives \$3,600 to his local church which helps to pay the salary of a youth pastor who cares for the kids in his neighborhood, keeps the lights on at church, provides benevolence to needy folks in his community, spreads the gospel in places around the world, funds a steady stream of teaching and ministry over years...

This man's giving is under the radar. It's not reported on by CNN, but it is far more substantial. It supports the local church - *the backbone of the Body of Christ...*

Here Paul is asking the Corinthians to lay aside something for a special cause, *but it's understood that it shouldn't take away from their regular giving.*

He says, “**storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come.**” Paul wants the church to take care of this matter before he arrives.

That’s probably for several reasons...

First, he has other matters that take precedent. This is an issue the Corinthians can wrap up themselves...

And second, these extra offerings should be decided on at home - *in prayer to God* - without the pressure of the pitches and appeals you might run in to at church.

Notice, Paul encourages them, “**storing up as he may prosper.**” Realize an important biblical truth... What you get is in direct proportion to what you give.

Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 9:6-7, “**He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver.**”

It’s true, you reap what you sow. It’s a spiritual principle... **Give a little get a little. Give a lot get a lot.**

Like the man who once said, “**I shovel out and God shovels in, and God has a bigger shovel than I do.**”

Paul continues speaking about this offering in verse 3, “**And when I come, whomever you approve by your letters I will send to bear your gift to Jerusalem. But if it is fitting that I go also, they will go with me.**”

This was real wisdom on Paul’s part. He wanted a representative of the people who gave the money to escort

the offering to its destination. Paul was very careful to be accountable for the monies God provided.

Acts 20:4 lists the representatives of the various churches who carried this offering to Jerusalem...

And likewise we at Calvary Chapel are accountable to God, and those who give, for the money we spend. Once a year, we publish a financial statement and show how the money that's given to God gets used.

Verse 5, “Now I will come to you when I pass through Macedonia (for I am passing through Macedonia). And it may be that I will remain, or even spend the winter with you, that you may send me on my journey, wherever I go.” Acts 20 tells us, after Paul's journey through Macedonia he spent three months in Greece.

But his plans changed when he ran into hostile Jews.

He was intending to sail on to Syria; but instead he doubled back through the cities of Macedonia.

Obviously, *Paul's plans were always flexible.*

This is why he writes in verse 7, “For I do not wish to see you now on the way; but I hope to stay a while with you, if the Lord permits.” Notice, *Paul's plans* were always predicated on *the Lord's will*. Paul always gave God permission to trump his plans with circumstance.

This doesn't mean Paul didn't make plans or was a fickle person you couldn't count on. Paul was a man of His word, and diligent to follow through, but he realized that God had the right to change his plans.

As it's said, “Man purposes, but God disposes.”

Paul understood that God was bigger than his plans.

The early Methodists had a saying. Sometimes they used it in their letters. It was added to their salutation!

They would write the initials “D.V.” It stood for a Latin phrase, “**Deo Volente,**” which meant, “**God willing.**”

“If the Lord permits...” - sometimes He doesn't. *Bad weather, a lack of funds, an illness, even persecution and jail time* was seen by Paul not as a distraction from God's will, but as a part of His divine guidance.

Paul ascended to the third heaven. He saw visions too glorious to talk about. But he also saw divine guidance in God's manipulation of daily circumstances.

Like a good GPS Paul saw God as sovereign over His every situation - at times, recalibrating His path.

Paul knew the truth, “**A bend in the road is not the end of the road if you're willing to make the turn.**”

Alexander Graham Bell, a devout Christian, once said, “**When one door closes, another opens, but we often look so long and regretfully at the closed door that we do not see the one that has opened for us.**” Not so with Paul, he was always looking for the open door.

He mentions in verse 8, “**But I will tarry in Ephesus until Pentecost.** (that is, late spring) **For a great and effective door has opened to me, and there are many adversaries.**” Paul wanted to stay in Ephesus - *that's where the action was* - open doors for the gospel.

In Acts 19 you can read about the great spiritual awakening that was occurring in the city of Ephesus.

The Ephesians were coming to Christ, and being filled with the Spirit. They were renouncing their former idolatry. They burned their occult paraphernalia and books. The entire city was stirred up for Christ's sake.

Paul couldn't leave just yet... A "great and effective door" for the gospel had opened up to Paul. He wanted to walk through the open door before it slammed shut.

But note, with *open doors* come "*many adversaries.*" We like the open doors - *not so much the adversaries.*

Once an old pastor stated, "Everywhere Paul went, he started a riot. Everywhere I go, they serve me tea."

Like Paul, an effective minister for Jesus will be a lightning rod for both *open doors* and *door slammers.*

The two go hand in hand. Where God is doing a great work, the devil will muster a stout opposition. Paul kept his eyes on the open doors, not the door slammers. *You and I should remember to do the same!*

Verse 10, "Now if Timothy comes, see that he may be with you without fear; for he does the work of the Lord, as I also do. Therefore let no one despise him."

Of course, Timothy was Paul's trusted ally.

But Timothy was a bit timid. Remember what Paul wrote to his young protege' in 2 Timothy 1 (6-7), "Stir up the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind."

Some people are bold by nature. They need to learn a little restraint. But others of us, like Timothy, are shy and apprehensive. Timothy, needed to be reminded *to buck up... to be bold... to have a backbone.*

And if ever there was an intimidating destination for Timothy it would certainly be his journey to Corinth.

Paul had said some hard things to this church. Timothy wasn't sure what kind of reception to expect.

Thus, Paul instructs the Corinthians to submit to his authority. *“He does the work of the Lord, as I also do.”*

“But send him on his journey in peace, that he may come to me; for I am waiting for him with the brethren.”

Verse 12, *“Now concerning our brother Apollos, I strongly urged him to come to you with the brethren, but he was quite unwilling to come at this time; however, he will come when he has a convenient time.”*

Apollos was the Bible teacher who came to Corinth after Paul planted the church. In 3:6 Paul had said, *“I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase.”*

Each of them played a role in the church at Corinth.

Here we have an interesting window into the interaction of the apostles. We learn that the early church had no hierarchy or apostolic pecking order.

Paul was certainly a heavyweight, yet Apollos felt free to disagree. And Paul saw his opposition as legit.

Feel the passion in verse 12. Paul *“strongly urged”* Apollos to go to Corinth, but Apollos was *“quite unwilling”* to take heed

to Paul. It could've erupted in a division, but it didn't. Apparently, Paul relented. He ended it by saying, *"he'll come when it's convenient."*

And this happens among Christians even today. Sincere believers will often disagree. As long as it's not an essential of the faith, we can *disagree agreeably*.

Then Paul tells the Corinthians in verse 13, *"Watch, stand fast in the faith, be brave, be strong. Let all that you do be done with love."* What a challenge to us.

"Watch" - be on the lookout. We have an enemy who is like *"a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour."* He litters your path with traps and pitfalls. Be on your toes. Walk gingerly, carefully - lest you slip and fall.

"Stand fast in the faith" - it's not enough to have faith, we need to continue in that faith. The point is to finish our race. Your faith can fade down the back stretch, and pull up short. You can fail to cross the finish line. You need to *"stand fast"* - be firm - don't back down.

And *"be brave"* - literally the phrase means *"act like men."* That doesn't mean we all have to act like John Wayne - put the bad guys on notice - act all macho.

Men are supposed to be leaders in the home and in the church. Thus, to *"act like a man"* means to take responsibility. Be a leader. Stand up for others. Set the pace and pave the way for other people to follow.

You might even be *a girly girl, feminine and ladylike*, but when it comes to faith we all need to *"act like men."*

Which surprisingly, reminds me of a six year old little girl named Ruby Bridges. In 1960 a federal judge ordered New Orleans' public schools to open their doors to African-American children. Six black children were chosen to integrate William Frantz Elementary.

But the uproar was so severe, only one child chose to attend. Everyday, little Ruby walked to school with four federal marshals at her side, through a crowd of screaming white folks who were throwing things and shouting at a little girl, *no less*. One woman put a black baby doll in a wooden coffin and paraded in front of the school. The meanness was awful. Yet most days Ruby prayed for her tormentors - for Jesus to forgive them.

US Marshal Charles Burks remembers Ruby, "She showed a lot of courage. She never cried. She didn't whimper. She just marched along like a little soldier..."

At the time, psychologist Robert Coles, took note of Ruby's bravery. He quoted her mom, "There's a lot of people who talk about doing good, and a lot of people who argue about what's good and what's not good,' but there are other folks who 'just put their lives on the line for what's right.'" This is what Paul is saying when he challenges the Corinthians to "*be brave*" - "to act like men." His words apply to little girls **and** to grown men!

He also says, "*be strong.*" As Paul said to the Ephesians, "Be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might." Our greatest strength is found in the Lord.

And then "*Let all that you do be done with love.*"

Love is the most powerful force on the planet. It's the greatest change agent known to man. It can melt a heart and stiffen a backbone. In all we do, show love!

Realize all the terms in verse 13 are military jargon.

Watch or post a lookout. *Stand fast* or keep ranks. *Act like men* or take responsibility. *Be strong* or don't flinch when attacked. And do all you do *with love*. We fight evil with good. We resist our enemies with love.

Then Paul tells them in verse 15, "I urge you, brethren - you know the household of Stephanas, that it is the first fruits of Achaia..." Achaia was the Greek region around Corinth, and the family of Stephanas were the area's very first converts to Christianity.

"And that they have devoted themselves to the ministry of the saints - that you also submit to such, and to everyone who works and labors with us."

Apparently, Stephanas was not only the first believer in the area, he was also the pastor of the church at Corinth. He and his family had founded the church.

Paul encourages the Corinthians to submit to its local leadership - this makes it easier on your pastor. Stephanas' ministry was an extension of Paul's...

Remember earlier in Paul's letter he had rebuked the Corinthians for rallying around celebrities. They said, "I'm of Paul," or "I'm of Apollos," or "I'm of Cephas."

Here Paul says forget about the superstar pastors, the celebrity pastors - *support your local pastor...*

Stand by the faithful pastor, like a Stephanas, who labors in the trenches and stays committed to the church in the good times and in the bad times - not the slick guy with the novel approach who sweeps in and impresses everyone; then leaves before you get to know him. Don't be duped by star-studded resumes.

Follow the guy who remains faithful.

Paul says in verse 17, "I am glad about the coming of Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus, for what was lacking on your part they supplied." For they refreshed my spirit and yours. Therefore acknowledge such men." This was the trio that had prompted this letter.

They'd visited Paul in Ephesus and reported to him all the problems that existed in the church at Corinth.

Now they're returning with his letter... Paul knows they could be branded as tattle-tails, or worse, so he urges the church to show them great respect.

They were a refreshment to Paul and to the church.

"The churches of Asia greet you." Remember, he was writing from Ephesus - the chief city of Asia Minor.

"Aquila and Priscilla greet you heartily in the Lord, with the church that is in their house." Notice, Aquila and Priscilla are at it again. Everywhere you find them in the NT they're hosting a church in their house.

They opened both their hearts and home to the Lord and His church. Prior to Ephesus, Aquila and Priscilla had lived in Corinth. It was there Paul met them. They had journeyed with

Paul to Ephesus. Now they're sending their greetings back to their friends in Corinth.

Remember, for the first three centuries Christianity grew without the aid of church buildings. The early believers met in homes of not more than thirty people.

I love what author Max Lucado writes, "Long before the church had pulpits and baptisteries, she had kitchens and dinner tables. Even a casual reading of the New Testament unveils the house as the primary tool of the church... Not everyone can serve in a foreign land, lead a relief effort, or volunteer at the downtown soup kitchen. But who can't be hospitable?"

Do you have a front door? A table? Chairs? Bread and meat for sandwiches? Congratulations! You just qualified to serve in the most ancient of ministries: hospitality... It's no accident that hospitality and hospital come from the same Latin word, for they both lead to the same result: healing.

When you open your door to someone, you are sending this message: "You matter to me and to God." You may think you are saying, "Come over for a visit." But what your guest hears is, "I'm worth the effort."

In verse 20 we're winding down. "All the brethren greet you. Greet one another with a holy kiss." In his paraphrase, Philips renders this, "I should like you to shake hands all round as a sign of Christian love." *And I get it...* A modern handshake is probably the cultural equivalent of an ancient kiss - especially for dudes.

Yet five times in the NT we're told "*greet one another with a holy kiss.*" Granted the kiss has to be *holy* - not lustful or sensual - but a greeting needs to be more than just a nod. It needs to be sincere and expressive.

Perhaps we miss out on the warmth humans need by limiting our greetings to a mere handshake... If not a kiss, there's nothing wrong with a hug! And if you go with a handshake - please make it *a hearty handshake.*

Verse 21 tells us, "*The salutation with my own hand - Paul's.*" Understand, the construction of this letter.

It was written on papyrus, and came as a scroll.

Because of Paul's likely eye problem, his letters were dictated to a stenographer. The writing was continuous. There were no spaces between the words or sentences. In the typical ancient text the script was in block columns, and all the letters were capitalized.

Also, in the first century forgeries were a problem.

That's why after the dictation, Paul took the pen from the hand of his scribe, and affix his own signature.

His signature was his mark of authenticity!

In 2 Thessalonians 3:17 Paul explained that this was what he did with all of his letters. Here he does the same... "*The salutation with my own hand - Paul's.*"

And then he writes, "*If anyone does not love the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be accursed.*" The Greek word "*accursed*" is "*anathema*" which means "*condemned.*"

Jesus is God's only provision for sin. He did on the cross what no one else could do. He paid for our forgiveness. He purchased for us God's righteousness.

If you don't love Jesus you're doomed to destruction.

Then Paul adds an Aramaic phrase. In the original it's "Maranatha" or "O Lord, come!" Aramaic was the local language of Judea - the language Jesus spoke.

"Maranatha" was one of the earliest distinctively Christian terms. An article of faith in the early church was the belief in Jesus' soon return for His church!

Anathema to those who don't love Jesus! Those who love Him, want to see Him, so *Maranatha* He's coming!

Paul closes his letter to the Corinthians, with his salutation, "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. My love be with you all in Christ Jesus. Amen."