

# THROUGH THE BIBLE STUDY

## 1 CORINTHIANS 15-16

I want to talk about *the greatest day of your life...* not the day of your wedding... or graduation... or retirement date... or the day you'll make your last mortgage payment... or the day that your probation ends... or the day the Falcons finally win a Super Bowl... No!

I'm talking the day Jesus snatches away His Church. For if you follow Jesus that will be your very best day!

1 Thessalonians 4 tells us, on that day the Lord will descend from heaven with a shout - the voice of the archangel and trumpet of God - and the spirits of those who died in Christ will come with Him - *their bodies will be resurrected and reunited with their spirits.*

Then we who are alive at the time will be beamed up, transformed into a glorified state, and snatched away to live forever with Jesus. *It'll be a really good day*, and that day is what 1 Corinthians 15 is all about.

Verse 1, *"Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you."* Notice, **saving faith is a standing faith.** It takes a stand. It's not enough to simply believe, you have to *"hold fast"* to your faith. And this theme of faith's perseverance appears over and over in the NT. We're saved not by just having faith, but by continuing in it.

It reminds me of a Monday Night Football Game a few years ago when Eagles' receiver DeSean Jackson, slipped behind the defense to catch a 61 yard bomb from Donovan McNabb. He glided into the end zone. *It was a touchdown, or was it? There was one problem.* Jackson inadvertently dropped the ball on the one yard line. The Cowboys recovered and negated the score. It just goes to prove *you've got to finish what you start.*

You can't score if you drop the ball. And likewise with salvation - *you've got to cross the goal line of life with your faith in tact.* It's not enough to have had faith at some time in the past, if you don't finish with your faith.

People often ask me, *"Do you believe in eternal security?"* And my answer is *"Absolutely, as long as you're trusting in Jesus, you are eternally secure."*

Salvation has nothing to do with my works - what I do or don't do. It's all about faith. But a saving faith endures. Paul says, *"hold fast that word which I preached to you..."* Don't fumble away your faith!

Verse 3 *"For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received..."* The Gospel Paul preached wasn't his own invention. He delivered what he'd received from God... And here's the Gospel, *"That Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures,"*

Isaiah 53, Psalm 22, and Leviticus 16 prophesied in detail the death of our Savior. The entire Levitical system of sacrifice foreshadowed the death of Jesus on Calvary's cross.

"And that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures..." Several OT passages predicted Jesus' resurrection. One of the clearest is Psalm 16:10, "For You will not leave my soul in Sheol, nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption." Messiah won't be left to rot, but be raised.

And here, Paul says the OT Scriptures even predicted Jesus would rise from the dead on "*the third day.*" Yet where is that detail found? You've got to delve deeper. It's taught metaphorically three times.

**First is Jonah.** As a type of Christ he was three days and three nights in the belly of the fish... **Second is the feast of first fruits.** The harvest celebration that occurred three days after the Passover. Jesus was resurrected three days after His death on Passover.

And finally, you see three days **in the story of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac.** Three days elapsed from the time Abraham committed to sacrifice his son, until God delivered Isaac on the top of Mount Moriah.

Scripture predicted Messiah would rise on the third day... And what Scripture predicted, history affirmed. For in the next few verses, Paul mentions numerous eyewitnesses of Jesus' resurrection. Verse 5, "And that He was seen by Cephas (that is, Peter), then by the twelve. After that He was seen by over 500 brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep." Paul wrote this letter to the Corinthians around 57 AD. That means it had been just 25 years since Jesus' resurrection. Paul is noting that many of the eyewitnesses were alive and kicking.

If the Corinthians doubted his Gospel all they had to do was interview the eye-witnesses; for God based the Good News that saves on historically verifiable events.

God stepped into the real world. Our Savior Jesus occupied a point on the timeline. Other religions are tied to metaphysical speculation, and vague promises, but Christianity is built on objective evidence. Its enemies could've shot Christianity *down* before it got off the *ground*. All they had to do was present the corpse of Jesus. *They didn't, because He was alive!*

Verse 7, "After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles. Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time." Years after He ascended to heaven, the risen Christ made a special post-resurrection appearance to Paul on the Road to Damascus. I believe Paul was the twelfth apostle, Judas' replacement. He just joined the band a little later. Or as Paul phrases it, "*Born out of due time...*"

And Paul talks about his apostleship. "For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God."

It's interesting, Paul wrote 1 Corinthians in 57 AD, yet he called himself "*the least of the apostles...*" He writes Ephesians three years later, in 60 AD, and calls himself "*the least of all the saints...*" Finally, when he writes 1 Timothy, five years after Ephesians, in 65 AD, Paul refers to himself as "*the chief of sinners...*"

The longer Paul walked with Jesus the lower an estimation he had of himself. And this should be true of us, the more we hang out with Jesus - and behold His glory - the smaller we'll become in our own eyes.

Verse 10, "*But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.*" On his own Paul was "*the least of the apostles,*" but by grace Christianity's chief *opponent* became its *main proponent!* Paul received God's freely-given pardon and blessing; then spent the rest of His life finding ways to say thanks to God.

People today take pride in being a **self-made man**, Paul rejoiced that he was a **grace-made man**. All that the apostle accomplished he chalked up to grace!

I like to tell people, I'm hanging on a slender thread called "*grace*" - but the longer I do, the more I realize it's stronger than a thousand ropes. *Paul would agree.*

And with grace what matters is the message not the messenger. Paul says in verse 11, "*Therefore, whether it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed.*"

Verse 12, "*Now if Christ is preached that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen.*" Again, Paul is writing to correct problems in the church at Corinth. And evidently, there was confusion over the idea of the physical resurrection of the body. The Corinthians were Greek, and Greek philosophy and Jewish theology were at odds on this vital subject.

The Greeks taught that the body was the cage of man's soul. Humanity's ultimate triumph is to be free from his fleshly prison. The body just is temporary housing. While, Jews taught the body's resurrection. Our ultimate triumph is not **freedom from the body**, but **transformation of the body**. One day yet future the trumpet will blow and our bodies will rise anew.

Thus, our victory isn't merely *escaping the flesh*, but there needs to be a *reshaping of the flesh*. The Jews believed God's goal was the elimination of sin's effects. God would one day raise our body uncorrupted by sin.

Certainly, the Corinthians were Christians - they believed in Jesus' resurrection - but some of them held to a Greek concept of the afterlife. And here, Paul sets them straight. They're contradicting themselves. For if you don't believe in the resurrection of everyone's body, how can you embrace the resurrection of the body of Jesus? *You can't have one without the other.*

Verse 14, "*And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty.*"

Without Jesus' resurrection Christianity crumbles like a house of cards. If He's just another dead guy, like Mohammed, or Buddha, or Moses - He's not the Lord of life! Jesus loses His uniqueness. He's not who He said He is. **"Yes, and we are found false witnesses of God, because we have testified of God that He raised up Christ, whom He did not raise up - if in fact the dead do not rise."** Paul states the obvious. If you deny the bodily resurrection of the dead; then the Gospel of the risen Lord Jesus is a lie, and its preachers are liars.

### **Christianity rises or falls on the resurrection!**

**"For if the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins!"** Jesus had a human body, so to deny the resurrection of human bodies in general, is to deny His resurrection. *And if Jesus didn't overcome death; then sin's penalty was never paid, we're all still guilty, and lost forever.* We might as well trash our Bibles, sell off the church buildings, go out and get drunk. *If life stops at the grave, then it's just eat, drink, and be merry.*

And neither would there be any hope for our loved ones who have already died. Paul says, **"Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished."**

If Jesus didn't rise from the dead you can forget about seeing your believing mom and dad, or spouse, or friend. Paul sums it up, **"If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable."**

If there's nothing more to life than the here and now; then the sacrifices necessary to live the Christian life aren't worth making! If Jesus never rose from the dead, then **"the last man with the most toys really does win."**

**But that's not what life is about!** For verse 20 tells us, **"But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep."**

The fact is Jesus has risen from the dead! Today, He dwells in His Father's glory. And His resurrection paves the way for us to follow. The person who presents their body to Jesus a living sacrifice, will one day see Jesus transform that body. We too will be resurrected. This is why Paul calls Jesus **"the first fruits"** of resurrection.

The OT feast called **"First Fruits"** occurred three days after Passover. The priest brought a bundle of wheat to the Lord. It was the first of the spring crop, but it represented the entire harvest - thus, **"first fruits."** When the priest waved it before God He was saying there was more to come, and it all belonged to God.

This is why Paul calls Jesus **"the first fruits"** of the harvest. Jesus was the first of many followers who's bodies will one day be resurrected. Because Jesus rose from the dead there now will be more to come.

**"For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. But each one in his own order: Christ the first fruits, afterward those who are Christ's at His coming."** People who are only born once, born of Adam, share the destiny of their great-great-grandfather - they die and rot in the grave.

But folks who are born twice - who're born spiritually in Christ - are destined to be like Jesus. Their body will live forever... *And there's an order to resurrection.* Jesus was risen at His first coming in 32 AD. The bodies of His followers will be resurrected at His return.

Verse 24, "Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet."

1 Thessalonians 4 tells us that the Church will be resurrected at the rapture - and our mass exodus will be followed by seven years of what the Bible calls "Great Tribulation." During this time God's wrath will be poured out on this wicked world. This climatic period of judgment ends when Jesus triumphs over all His enemies, and establishes His Kingdom on the earth.

At His first coming, *salvation was on Jesus' mind.* At His second coming, *domination will be on His mind.* Gentle Jesus will crush His enemies. He'll take world rulers by the scruff of the neck and make them to bow!

In John 5:28-29 Jesus tells us there're actually two future resurrections. "The hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear (the Father's) voice and come forth - those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation." The resurrection of the believer's body occurs at the rapture. Whereas, Revelation 20:12 tells us, after Jesus reigns over the earth for a thousand years, Hades will be emptied out. At that time the lost will also be resurrected - *but not to life*, their bodies will be tossed into the lake of fire.

Verse 26, "The last enemy that will be destroyed is death." One day our archenemy, death, will no longer threaten believers. Revelation 20:14 tells us, "Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire."

Next Paul quotes Psalm 8:6, "For '(Jesus) has put all things under His feet.'" And that includes death!... This is the ultimate goal in God's eternal plan. All things, including death, will be in submission to King Jesus.

And then Paul points to a technicality that sheds light on the unity of God. He writes, "But when He says..."

*And who is He? Who was the author of Psalm 8?* In a sense it was David, but in a deeper sense it's the Spirit of God. Thus, when God "says "all things are put under Him (that is, Jesus)," it is evident that He who put all things under Him is excepted. Now when all things are made subject to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him who put all things under Him, that God may be all in all." God the Father exalts God the Son; then in the end the Son of God submits to the Father. The members of the Godhead are equal in nature, yet distinct in the roles they play in His plan.

Verse 29 is at first a puzzling passage. Paul writes, "Otherwise, what will they do who are baptized for the dead, if the dead do not rise at all? Why then are they baptized for the dead?" Recall, Paul is trying to assure the Corinthians that the dead are resurrected. Here He brings up a pagan practice to make his point. The cults of his day practiced what we'd call "proxy baptisms."

Today's cults do the same. Despite the biblical insistence that we're all responsible for our own decisions, Mormons get baptized for dead people who weren't Mormons. Supposedly, it gives the person a second chance to become a Mormon. *As if that did you any good in the first place. It's a false religion.*

Proxy baptism is just superstition, and nowhere does the NT teach that it conveys any merit or opportunity!

Especially not here... Notice how Paul words his argument, "*what will THEY do who are baptized for the dead?*" and "*why then are THEY baptized for the dead?*" Paul never says "us," he's specific, it's "*they.*" "*They*" meaning idolatrous pagans. Proxy-baptism was never a Christian practice. It was an aberrant ritual performed in heathen temples... But the practice did indicate belief in a physical resurrection. So here, Paul is asking, *no one would be baptized for a friend if they didn't believe their physical body would one day be resurrected? So if even the heathen can see the truth of the resurrection, why can't Spirit-filled believers?*

Verse 30, "*And why do we stand in jeopardy every hour? I affirm, by the boasting in you which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily.*" Paul was physically persecuted for his belief in a bodily resurrection. If it was a lie and not true, why does he suffer daily?

"*If, in the manner of men, I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what advantage is it to me?*" Paul wrote this letter from Ephesus. He says he fought "*beasts*" for Christ's sake. He's probably referring to evil men, but it's possible he was thrown to the lions a time or two.

The point is, if there is no resurrection; then Paul was wasting his life suffering for a false doctrine. He says, "*If the dead do not rise, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die!"* Again, if Jesus didn't rise from the dead, and all we're looking forward to is rotting away; then live for today. *Grab for all the gusto you can get!*

Verse 33, but "*Do not be deceived: "Evil company corrupts good habits."* The reason some of the Corinthians had embraced false doctrine is because they were hanging out with heretical people. Which proves, *hang* with the wrong crowd and you'll get *hung!* Evil rubs off on you. Thus, choose your friends wisely!

He says, "*Awake to righteousness, and do not sin; for some do not have the knowledge of God. I speak this to your shame.*" You've heard, "*Ignorance is bliss.*" Don't believe it! What you don't know can hurt you!

Take for example the man from Bristol, England who dove headfirst off the local pier. He plunged 25 feet into the ocean - but what he didn't know was it happened to be low tide and the water level was 18 inches deep.

Proving that what we don't know can have a tremendous *impact!* Wake up. Learn what you believe. Don't be ignorant of the book that's sitting in your lap.

"But someone will say, "How are the dead raised up? And with what body do they come?" Some of the Corinthians were asking about the mechanics of the resurrection. And so Paul explains, "Foolish one, what you sow is not made alive unless it dies." Paul uses agriculture to teach us some theology. And here's the first principle, **resurrection requires death**. Before fruit sprouts, its seed has to be buried and die. Here's what he stresses, **death always precedes resurrection**.

"And what you sow, you do not sow that body that shall be, but mere grain - perhaps wheat or some other grain. But God gives it a body as He pleases, and to each seed its own body." A new body comes only after *the old body* dies. A seed nestles into the ground and dies, so that from it God can resurrect new fruit.

"All flesh is not the same flesh, but there is one kind of flesh of men, another flesh of animals, another of fish, and another of birds." God created different types of bodies to survive in different environments. A bird's body needs to be *aerodynamic*. A fish's body needs to be *aqua-dynamic*. A body that's suitable to one ecosystem may not adapt to another environment.

The Creator fits all of life with a body that's suitable for its surroundings. And the same is true spiritually.

"There are also celestial bodies and terrestrial bodies; but the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another." As there are different fleshly bodies there are *earthly bodies* and *heavenly* bodies. "There is one glory of the sun, another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for one star differs from another star in glory." Each star has its own mass, luminosity, and density - its own characteristics.

"So also is the resurrection of the dead. The body is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body." Again, nothing is resurrected until it first dies. Life springs from death. Bodies only change in character after they die. That's when a body goes *from corruptible to incorruptible, from shameful to glorious, from weak to strong, from physical to spiritual*.

I'll never forget the young man who gave his life to Jesus on his death bed. He was in the hospital - in terrible pain, dying of cancer. I baptized him in his bed.

And I remember asking Mike, "*Is there anything else I can do for you?*" He said matter-of-factly, "*No, unless you can get me another body.*" Well, guess what?... I can't, but that is exactly what Jesus can do and will do!

One day my friend, Mike, will get his new body. It'll be a pain-free, cancer-free body. In fact, everyone who trusts in Jesus will one day receive a brand new body.

Verse 44, "There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body. And so it is written, "The first man Adam became a living being." The last Adam became a life-giving spirit.

However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural, and afterward the spiritual. The first man (which was Adam) was of the earth, made of dust; the second Man (that is Jesus) is the Lord from heaven.”

Adam was earthy. Jesus is heavenly. Adam came first; then came Jesus. This is God’s order - *our current bod is from the sod, but our future bod is from God.*

I have a definite principle when it comes to rearing kids. Every teenager needs to drive a beater (a rusted out vehicle) before they graduate to a nice ride. They’ll appreciate the newer model car after driving the jalopy.

The same is true with us. Right now we’re in a jalopy of a body. But Jesus is going to put us in a brand new model, fresh-off-the-lot. One day will I finally drive a body with no dents. We’ll have the new car smell!

During the weeks after His resurrection, Jesus displayed the capabilities of our own future bodies. He took His heavenly body on a forty-day test drive. The risen Christ was unhindered by time and space. He appeared to two of His disciples on the Road to Emmaus; then vanished as they were having lunch...

The disciples were in Jerusalem behind closed doors, when Jesus appeared in their midst. His body came right through the walls... *yet He held out his hands for Thomas to touch.* Jesus was still flesh and bone. He even ate a breakfast of fish and bread with the disciples... *This is the body we’ll one day possess.*

Here’s how I imagine our glorified bodies... *Lock your keys in the car? No biggie, you can just transport through the door panel... But who’ll need a car? Want to take a jaunt around the world? You’ll be able to travel at the speed of desire... This will be real-life Star Trek stuff! We’ll all get a body that’s out-of-this-world!*

Verse 48, “*As was the man of dust, so also are those who are made of dust; and as is the heavenly Man, so also are those who are heavenly.*” A Christian goes from an earthy body of dirt, to a heavenly body of celestial substance - *in a sense from dust to stardust.*

“*And as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly Man (which is Jesus). Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption.*” When the astronauts first walked on the moon, NASA knew a human body could never survive on the lunar surface. Our earthly body wasn’t fit for lunar life. That’s why NASA designed a life-support suit perfectly fitted for the moon.

And likewise, our mortal bodies aren’t suited to survive the awesome presence of God. Enter pure holiness in flesh and blood, and you’ll fry like eggs on a griddle. When we enter God’s throne room we’ll have to shed *our earth-suits*, and suit up in *a spiritual body!*

*But how will it happen?* Verse 51, “*Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed...*” A metamorphosis is coming. At the rapture we’ll be snatched to heaven, and we’ll get new bodies.



For, "In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed." You would think a transformation *from earthy body to heavenly body* would take hours, but Jesus plans to give me a new body - not in a blink - but in a twinkle. And a twinkle of an eye is even faster than its blink!

My wife, Kathy, likes to plant bulbs - ugly, twisted bulbs. *Who would think a gnarly bulb would sprout into a beautiful flower?* Yet this is what happens when Jesus returns for His church. You and I are ugly, gnarly bulbs, but we'll suddenly bloom into gorgeous flowers.

We're caterpillars who turn into butterflies. On that day we'll shed our cocoons and sprout wings... I love the inscription on the tombstone, "Budded on earth to bloom in heaven." This is the destiny of all believers.

Verse 53, "For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality." Bodies designed for time and space aren't capable of occupying eternity. We'll need bodies with heavenly capacities. *Our mortal bodies must put on immortality.*

"So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory." Our Lord Jesus won't be satisfied until He has reversed every trace of sin and its painful consequences - *especially that of death.*

He'll one day abolish death once and for all, and Paul is so sure of it, he begins to taunt death... "O Death, where is your sting?" Death is the only pest that stings before it bites. The worse aspect of death is not that it stops life, but that it spoils life before it ends. It casts a cloud over the good times knowing they'll one day be over... *The wealthy man doesn't feel as rich knowing he can't take it with him... Fame loses its luster knowing it won't last... Death is a robber. It steals joy.*

Death terminates relationships - it busts up homes and hearts - it creates missed opportunities - it causes regrets that are never resolved. *Death certainly stings!*

Once a little boy was allergic to bee stings. He and his dad were driving in the car when he saw a bee fluttering over the front dash. The little guy panicked.

He screamed for his father, who was driving, to do something. The dad reached up with his fist and caught the bee. But after a minute, he released his fist and let the bee fly away. Again the boy came unglued. *What was his dad trying to do?* That's when the dad opened his fist, and showed his son the stinger stuck in his palm. The dad allowed the bee to sting him instead.

*And this is what Jesus has done for us!* He's taken the sting of death in His feet, and hands, and side. Jesus was separated from His Father so we could live with Him forever. He paid sin's penalty so we could be forgiven. *Once and for all, Jesus defeated death.*

And now Paul taunts death! "*O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?*" The bars of Hades have been broken. Jesus has sprung us free.

Paul sums it up, "*The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.*"

Verse 58, "*Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.*" There is life after the grave. One day we'll stand before our Creator. *This means our labor for the Lord really does matter.* What you do today effects eternity.

This is why Paul says, "*be steadfast* (never give up), *immovable* (never give in), *always abounding* (never give out) *in the work of the Lord.*" Never give up, never give in, never give out. What you do for Jesus counts!

**Chapter 16, "Now concerning the collection for the saints..."** Paul had been taking an offering from the Gentile churches for the first church in Jerusalem.

The Christians in Jerusalem had fallen on hard times. Judea was suffering a famine that had left many folks hungry. Paul felt the Gentile Christians owed their Jewish brothers a debt of gratitude. In a sense, the Gentiles' spiritual heritage had begun in Jerusalem.

He continues, "*As I have given orders to the churches of Galatia, so you must do also: On the first day of the week...*" (Notice, that's when Christians met, *then and now*, on Sundays - the day Jesus rose from the dead.) And when church gathers, "*Let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come.*"

Here's a part of worship that's often overlooked, but is just as important as our singing or praying - and perhaps more revealing as to where our heart lies. **We also worship God with the giving of our money.**

Paul wanted the Church in Corinth to pony up and take care of their part in the collection before his visit. It would be awkward for Paul to deal with this personally.

"*And when I come, whomever you approve by your letters I will send to bear your gift to Jerusalem.*" This was wise. Paul says he'll bring along a representative of the people who gave the money, to escort that money to its destination. He was willingly accountable

"*But if it is fitting that I go also, they will go with me.*"

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. 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.*" Or as it's pronounced in Latin, "*Deo Volente,*" that is, "*God willing.*" Paul was the pre-eminent leader of the church, but he never stopped following Jesus. His decisions were contingent... "*if the Lord permits*"

“But I will tarry in Ephesus until Pentecost (or late spring). For a great and effective door has opened to me, and there are many adversaries.” Hey, *adversaries* didn't stop Paul from pursuing *opportunities*. If Christians were less intimidated by our adversaries we'd find a lot more opportunities to speak for Jesus!

Verse 10, "And 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. But send him on his journey in peace, that he may come to me; for I am waiting for him with the brethren." Timothy was coming through Corinth on his way to Paul in Ephesus. Paul asks them to help him on his journey.

Just as he'll encourage Apollos to visit Corinth, "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." We don't know why he was unwilling at that time, but Paul is confident he'll make his way to Corinth when he has the opportunity.

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." Watch, stand, belief, be brave, be strong, and be loving - what a challenge for you and I.

"I urge you, brethren - you know the household of Stephanas, that it is the first fruits of Achaia." Stephanas' family was Paul's first converts in Corinth.

"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, he became the pastor. His family founded the church.

Earlier in Paul's letter he had rebuked the Corinthians for rallying around celebrity pastors. Folks were saying, "I'm of Paul," "I'm of Apollos," "I'm of Cephas." Here he snubs the superstars, and tells them to *support their local leadership*. Be loyal to the faithful pastor who serves in the trenches, *the Stephanas* - not the slick, polished guy who sweeps into town and impresses everyone before they really get to know him.

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 who came to Paul with Corinthian support. They had also reported to Paul the problems in Corinth. Paul knows they could be branded tattle-tails, so he urges everyone to show them respect.

"The churches of Asia greet you. Aquila and Priscilla greet you heartily in the Lord, with the church that is in their house." And along with Paul in Ephesus, Aquila and Priscilla, are at it again. Everywhere you find them in Scripture there's a church meeting in their house. They opened both their hearts and home to the Lord.

This dynamic duo had once lived in Corinth. Through Paul they now send their greetings to their friends

"All the brethren greet you. Greet one another with a holy kiss." And the point here, is not whether we greet each other with a *kiss*, or *handshake*, or *hug*, or *high five* - but whatever greeting we use do it warmly and sincerely - and most importantly in a "*holy*" manner.

"The salutation with my own hand - Paul's." The apostle's custom was to dictate his correspondence to a stenographer; then at the end of his dictation he would add his signature to authentic the letter.

Verse 22, "If anyone does not love the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be accursed." Or "*Anathema*" - it means *excommunicated*. If you're not allied to God's Son you're not part of God's family... Paul adds an Aramaic phrase, "*Maranatha*." In English it's "*O Lord, come!*" His constant longing was to be caught up with Jesus!

He closes his first letter to the Corinthians in verse 23, "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. My love be with you all in Christ Jesus. Amen."