



151st Church of Christ
Small Group Study Guide – 1 CORINTHIANS
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AN IMPERFECT LOCAL CHURCH
A Study in 1 Corinthians
TEACHER – Lesson 24

GENERAL OUTLINE

1 Corinthians 16:1-24, Final thoughts

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16:1-4, Another question: the collection

16:5-18, Paul's plans and exhortations

16:19-24, Final greetings

In this last chapter of the letter Paul deals with a series of practical and personal topics. Two of the items seem to be responses to questions asked of Paul by the Corinthians: "Now concerning the collection," and, "Now concerning our brother Apollos." The entire chapter has something to do with travel and fellowship: Paul's travel plans (including travel related to the collection); travel of Paul's associates such as Timothy; Apollos' travel plans; the financial fellowship demonstrated by the collection; the fellowship of encouragement among various Christians; Paul's final greetings. Every item is an example of how Christians should care for each other in the body of Christ as Paul has been teaching throughout the letter.

DISCUSSION

1 Corinthians 16:1-4, Another question: the collection

The collection for the churches in Judea was a pet project for Paul. We learn more about this effort in 2 Corinthians 8-9, where Paul is focused on the attitudes that should motivate their participation. Here he answers a simple question about the procedure to follow in collecting the funds and transporting the gift to Jerusalem (cf. 2 Corinthians 8:20).

There is some uncertainty about the laying aside (ESV, storing up) on the 1st day of the week. Does this mean to store up at home or bring to the assembly and store up together?

- 1. Why does he say to lay aside on the 1st day of the week? What was the significance of that day? What would have been the practical reason for specifying the day? How would they have avoided having "collections when I come," if they had "stored up" at home?**

Rather than ordering them to meet on Sunday, this statement reflects their normal practice. Early Christians met on the first day of the week since that was the day Jesus rose from the

dead. If they regularly met on Sunday (cf. Acts 20:7), that would be the most convenient time to bring their offering. Paul is probably as interested in the convenience of contributing on Sunday more than any other reason. If they were to set aside their donation at home and leave it at home until Paul's arrival, the day for "laying aside" would have little importance. If, however, they were to bring it to the assembly and lay it aside there, then the day makes more sense, and there would be no need for collections when Paul arrived.

2. What concerns might Paul be addressing by sending local brethren with letters of recommendation with the funds (cf. 2 Corinthians 8:16-24)?

Integrity & safety: carrying a large amount – probably in coin – would have made an attractive target for thieves. There would be safety in numbers. There would also be transparency in the handling of the donated funds on the long trip to Jerusalem. Paul wanted everything to be and to appear above board. Churches should always handle funds in a way that is not only honest, but which inspires trust and confidence.

Fellowship and testimony: there would be a special bond of love expressed when representatives of the participating congregations were present at delivery.

3. Look through 2 Corinthians 8 & 9 and find "spiritual" words associated with the role and meaning of the collection in the life of the church and her members. Hint: it was more than a simple matter of donating money.

Fellowship: 2 Corinthians 8:4; 9:13

Service: 2 Corinthians 8:4; 9:1, 12, 13

Grace: 2 Corinthians 8:4, 6, 7, 19

Blessing: 2 Corinthians 9:5

There may be more. The collection is not described as "giving back to God," but of having fellowship among contributors as well as with recipients. We can make private donations to good works, but there is something special about Christians joining financial forces to do good. It is an expression of the love that should reign within the church, both locally and worldwide.

1 Corinthians 16:5-18, Paul's plans and exhortations

4. In what cities had Paul started congregations in the province of Macedonia?

Philippi, Thessalonica & Berea (Acts 16:1-17:13)

- 5. Compare Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians 4:19 about his plan to visit in Corinth "shortly" with his plans as stated in 1 Corinthians 16:6, including the more uncertain, "wherever I go." What do these statements say about the certainty of Paul's plans, his inspired apostle status, and God's will for his ministry?**

Paul's plans were uncertain and subject to change just as ours are. Submitting his plans to God's will did not mean that God generally told him where to go next. Paul made his plans according to his personal preferences and didn't have to read signs from God to find out the "right" thing to do or "right" place to go.

- 6. Why would Paul say he had an open door for preaching the gospel in Ephesus if there were "many adversaries"? Would not "many adversaries" indicate a "closed door"?**

An "open door" didn't mean that he had any assurance that there would not be adversaries and opposition. It was not even a guarantee that there would be a great number of converts. It simply meant that he had opportunities to present the gospel.

- 7. What do we know of opposition to Paul's ministry in Ephesus? What do we know of his success in Ephesus (cf. Acts 19; 1 Corinthians 15:32)?**

While in Ephesus, there was a near riot that threatened Paul's life, and we know how easily a riot can get out of control. He had an experience that he called "fighting with beasts." But we also know that many people "heard the word," the "word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed" (Acts 19:10, 20). He left an established congregation with elders.

- 8. What does Paul say that suggests that he was concerned about the reception Timothy would receive in Corinth? Why would he have that concern (cf. 1 Corinthians 4:17-21)?**

Paul seems to have had more than a passing concern for Timothy's situation. He thought that Timothy might have reason to "fear" their behavior, and even that they would "despise" him. "Despise" here is not the same word as despise in 1 Timothy 4:12 (NKJV).

There were some in the congregation who didn't care for Paul and questioned his authority as an apostle. Paul says they were puffed up (1 Corinthians 4:12), and Timothy would have to deal with such brethren and remind them of things Paul taught with which they disagreed. As a member of Paul's team, these same people might have treated Timothy with some disdain. They may have been a bit intimidated by Paul, but the younger and less forceful Timothy would have been a less imposing target (cf. 1 Timothy 4:12; 2 Timothy 1:7).

9. What earlier statements in this letter about Apollos make Paul's personal contact and conversations with Apollos mentioned here particularly interesting?

The divisions mentioned in chapters 1 & 3 involved members who treated Apollos and Paul as rivals. Paul had already affirmed that he considered Apollos a trusted "fellow worker" and minister (1 Corinthians 3:5-9). Now, Paul demonstrates that he and Apollos were in communication with each other and had possibly seen each other recently. Though they disagreed on Apollos making an immediate visit to Corinth, each one had the right to handle his own schedule. Other than this minor disagreement, Paul says nothing negative about Apollos.

10. The word "watch" is used only here in 1 Corinthians, but Paul has used other words in this letter that carry much the same meaning. What are some of them? What were they to watch out for?

To be watchful is similar to being alert so that they would avoid being deceived and led astray. They were to "take heed" and "beware." We could also add the two times that he told them to "flee" (sexual immorality and idolatry) (1 Corinthians 6:9, 18; 8:9; 10:12, 14; 15:33-34).

11. Which of the Corinthian problems addressed by Paul in this letter were, in part, due to a failure to live by the exhortation of verse 14 (cf. chapter 13)?

They were to act in love in all things. Failure to love or live by love was responsible for the problems of: divisions (1 & 3), lawsuits (6), caring for the weak in matters of food (8), discrimination at the Lord's Supper (11), promoting edification in the assemblies (14).

12. Stephanus was one of the first converts in Achaia (the region of Corinth). What else do we know relating to his conversion?

He and his household were among the few personally baptized by Paul (1:16).

13. Paul doesn't give details here, but what services might Stephanus, Fortunatus, and Achaicus (v. 17) have rendered to Paul in connection with the Corinthian church (cf. 7:1)?

- In itself, their visit "refreshed" Paul.
- They may have brought financial help, either from the congregation or on their own.

- They probably carried the letter from the Corinthians that contained some of the questions that Paul has answered (7:1), and may have carried 1 Corinthians back to Paul.
- They may have been a source of some of the disturbing reports about the congregation (e.g., 11:18).

1 Corinthians 16:19-24, Final greetings

14. Who greets whom, and who is encouraged to greet whom?

- Churches in Asia sent greetings to Corinth.
- Priscilla & Aquila sent greetings (Had been with Paul in Corinth – Acts 18:1-3)>
- The house church hosted by Priscilla & Aquila sent greetings.
- All the brethren (i.e., those with Paul at the time and/or other brethren from other congregations or house churches in Ephesus).
- They were to greet each other in Corinth.
- Paul sends his own greeting.

15. How does this series of greetings complete the loop back to the opening statement in 1 Cor 1:2, and what major theme of the letter do they reinforce?

He began the letter by affirming the fellowship of all those in every place who call on the name of the Lord. He closes with a series of greetings among brethren in several parts of the empire. The church is the body of Christ, and we are all members of that body whether we are thinking of a local congregation or the universal church. In all cases, fellowship and connection between members are to be cherished and expressed. The Corinthian Christians tended to forget that. These greetings reminded them.

16. Where else in his letters does Paul call a curse on someone? What is the similarity between the reasons for which Paul says someone should be accursed?

In Galatians 1:6-9, Paul makes a similar pronouncement against anyone who announces a perverted gospel. In Paul's mind, not loving the Lord and preaching a different gospel could be two ways of saying the same thing. In both cases, the severity of Paul's language calls our attention once again to the fact that sound doctrine is the foundation of faithful Christian conduct.

17. What thoughts does Paul include in the last two verses of the letter that provide balance with that severe curse?

The severity of this warning, which was certainly addressed at some members of the Corinthian church, is balanced by a blessing of God's grace and the expression of Paul's love for all of the Corinthian Christians.