

Prayers

Opening prayer

O Lord, reveal Your gracious love for us in all its fullness;
Receive the confession of our faith; bless us and empower us;
Hear the confession of our sins, then forgive us and heal us;
Accept our desire and intent to change, and be gracious to us;
Lead us on, show us the path of true life, and guide us;
We praise You, O Lord, for Your love for us is real: AMEN

Prayer Suggestions

General theme for the week: vision

1. For yourself

What do you see happening in your life in the coming days? What difference does God make to this? Ask the Lord to help you fulfil His call on your life

2. For your friends and family

Pray for any of your friends who face difficult things in the coming days, pray that God will bless them as they yield to Him

3. For the church and its work

Pray that God's people the church will keep close to God's purposes which are to proclaim the Good News in word and deed

4. For your neighbourhood, your country and the world (News)

Pray that the evils you see at work in the world will be overcome, and the kingdom of God extended in our day

Meditation

You called Moses to lead ... and he became your friend.

You called Samuel to listen ... and he learned to lead.

You called Elijah to confront evil ... and he was victorious.

You called Elisha to follow ... and he did wondrous deeds

You called Amos to speak out ... and he exposed corruption

You called Hosea to marry ... and he learned about Your love

You called Isaiah to hear Your Word ... and he foretold the Messiah

You called Jonah to go to Nineveh ... and he learned to do Your will

You called Jeremiah to suffer in Jerusalem ... and he saw Your heart

You called Micah to identify injustice ... and he prophesied Your mercy

You called Ezekiel to go with the Spirit ... and he saw Your radiant beauty

You call us to follow in all their footsteps ... so You may be known today

Bible Study

Bible passage – 1 Corinthians 16:1-10

¹ Now, about the collection for the saints: you should follow the same instruction I gave to the churches of Galatia. ² On the first day of every week, each of you must put aside whatever has been saved if things have gone well, so that you do not need to make a collection when I come. ³ And whenever I arrive, I will give written authority to any whom you approve to take your gift to Jerusalem; ⁴ and if it seems right that I should go as well, they will come with me.

⁵ I will come to you after going through Macedonia (for I intend to go through Macedonia) ⁶ and I will possibly stay with you or spend the winter, so that you can send me on my way, wherever I go. ⁷ I do not want to see you now just in passing, for I hope to spend some time with you, if the Lord permits. ⁸ Instead, I will stay in Ephesus until Pentecost, ⁹ for a large and productive doorway has opened to me, but there are many opponents.

¹⁰ When Timothy comes, see that he is welcomed among you, for he is doing the work of the Lord just as I am; ¹¹ no one should despise him. Send him on his way in peace, so that he may come to me; for I am expecting him together with the fellow believers. ¹² Now, about our brother Apollos, I urged him strongly to go to you with the fellow believers, but he was quite unwilling to go at this time. He will come when he has an opportunity.

Review

Paul's first letter to the Corinthians was largely completed, and in this passage, Paul issued some final instructions, comments and personal greetings. Most of these are written in only a few verses, so in comparison to the weightier matters of the rest of the letter, this appears far less significant. We should however be careful, because a number of issues are mentioned of considerable importance. It does not take much investigation to realise that his comments were delicately phrased to give various careful signals to the Corinthians; firstly, about a collection he had been organising at Corinth (16:1-4); secondly, about the plans he was making for travelling around the Eastern Mediterranean region (16:5-9) and lastly, about the travel plans of Timothy and Apollos (16:10-12).

It is well known that in the latter days of his missionary journeys, Paul was attempting to gather a collection for the church at Jerusalem. The reasons for this are only partially known, because Paul never explains his mission to collect money for Jerusalem very clearly (for references, see later study). However, he called on the emerging Gentile churches to support the 'mother' church at Jerusalem, and the evidence of Scripture is that he sought the generosity of wealthy Gentile congregations in cosmopolitan Roman cities. What is most interesting is that in verse 2 of our reading, we have what is probably the earliest ever description of regular Christian giving. This was clearly done on Sunday 'the first day of the week' (16:2), presumably at worship, and Paul's instructions were that for any family, money should be put aside according to what was left over from what was needed; he did not mention tithing in any of his letters! In addition, Paul was careful to ensure that whilst he would commend anyone carrying a gift from Corinth to Jerusalem, he would not carry the gift himself (15:3,4). He may have organised the offering, but it was their gift to Jerusalem, not their gift to Paul or Paul's gift to Jerusalem.

Paul's travel plans (16:5-9) were full of conditions; 'possible', 'wherever' or 'whenever', or 'I hope ...'. He was a man of God working as the Spirit led, and at the time of writing the letter, he was engaged in a work at Ephesus in which great opportunities were opening up (16:8), and we can read about the extensive work that took place there in Acts 19. Following the Spirit's lead, the work at Ephesus spread widely to surrounding towns and regions, and churches were founded at Colossae and Laodicea (see Colossians 1:7 and 2:1). In order to go to Corinth and meet the church there, as he clearly wished (16:3,5), Paul would have to wait until it was right before the Lord, and even so, he faced a long journey by sea and land across Macedonia. He intended only to pass through Macedonia (via Philippi and Thessalonica) and then stay longer at Corinth, but His work demanded that he do only what 'the Lord permits' (16:7).

In the last paragraph, Paul sought to ease the path of others to Corinth, specifically Timothy and Apollos. Timothy was Paul's close friend, but was known to be relatively weak in personality and health (1 Tim 5:23, 2 Tim 1:7 etc.). Acts describes him at that time as travelling with Erastus (Acts 19:22), and he is frequently mentioned in Paul's letters doing some errand or other work (Rom 16:21, Phil 2:19 etc.). Using his considerable authority, Paul demanded that Timothy be given proper care as his fellow worker, and he was not to be ignored (16:11).

Lastly, Paul spoke about Apollos. As a favourite at Corinth (1:10f.), we might assume that Paul and Apollos were not good friends, but what we read here suggests otherwise. Paul passed on to the Corinthians what sounds like an apology from Apollos saying that he would not be going to Corinth; at least not yet, and even after Paul himself had urged him to go (16:12)! He, too, was a man of God with a commission to fulfil, and his answer to the Corinthian request to come was 'No!' This verse makes the furore at Corinth about parties supporting Paul and Apollos (1:10f.) seem trivial, and perhaps this was Paul's intent!

Going Deeper

- Notes on the translation of the passage
- The gift to the Jerusalem church, and the problem of money (16:1-4)

- Travel plans (16:5-9)
- Timothy and Apollos (16:10-12)

Notes on the translation of the passage

V2 'each of you must put aside whatever is saved if things have gone well.'

You will find that the Bible versions vary widely in the translations here. The Greek sentence is much simpler and made up from three words 'put aside', 'store up' and 'prosper' (or 'go well'). The idea is that when things go well, one should store up the extra earned in order that it can be used for the collection.

V3 'I will give written authority' Strictly,

'I will send with letters'. This was a form of official designation.

V5 'for I intend to go through Macedonia.'

The verb to 'go through' used in this verse is one that implies an inspection of some kind; like a centurion passing through his troops.

V6 'send me on my way'

This word means more than this, but is hard to express simply in English. It contains the idea of giving someone the necessary provisions for a substantial journey. Of course, with travel today, this is not a significant issue, whereas in the past, it was.

V10 'see to it that he is welcomed'

Many Bible versions have 'see to it that he is without fear among you ...' However, these words are no more than a manner of speaking about a suitable welcome; and this is the better translation.

The issue of the collection for the saints at Jerusalem is important, and it is mentioned in a significant number of New Testament texts, as we will now find out. Money has always been an important issue in the church, and it is fascinating to read how the early church dealt with this issue. Paul's travel arrangements and personal comments all add to the general picture of the times, and the exploration of these verses adds immeasurably to our understanding of the world of the early church.

The gift to the Jerusalem church, and the problem of money (16:1-4)

In the earliest days of the church, it is recorded in Acts that the Christians came together and pooled their resources, sharing all things as people needed (Acts 2:44, 4:34). It is thought that whilst this wonderful example of generosity lasted for some time in Jerusalem, it was not followed elsewhere, certainly not in Corinth where there appears to have been real divisions between rich and poor (11:17f.). In addition, it is fairly clear that there was opposition to the church in Jerusalem from Jews that would have made life difficult for them, both materially and financially. Resources once used could not so easily be replaced, especially when they may well have been used in the sending out of missionaries as well as in the support of widows (see both activities in Acts 6:1f.). If we also reflect that Jerusalem was known to suffer in those days from droughts and famine, then the picture of the church in Jerusalem was not good, and it became even worse when Jerusalem was sacked in 70AD. In Acts 11:27-30, we read about a prophet in the church at Antioch who prophesied a famine in Judea. The response of the church there was to make a collection and send a gift to Jerusalem, sending it by Barnabas and Saul (Paul). It is likely that this early experience etched on Paul's mind the need for the Gentile churches to support the church at Jerusalem.

From then on, we find copious references to gifts for Jerusalem in Paul's letters (Romans 15:24-26, 2 Cor 8-9, Gal 2:10, Philippians 4:15-20). Also, when facing an angry crowd in the Temple at Jerusalem many years later, Paul spoke in his defence about his bringing of a gift to the Judean capital (Acts 24:17). In his letters, Paul appealed to the churches to give without thought of controlling what happened to the gift; it was for the church, and this was all that mattered, though people would have known the plight of the Jerusalem church. In our passage today, Paul adds to the picture of Christian giving by telling people to 'set aside' (16:2) from what is left over of their affairs on the first day of the week. In the early centuries of the Christian church, scholars believed that the particular word used by Paul here meant that this activity was done at home, and then brought to the church assembly for gathering and distribution. Investigations that are more recent suggest that as churches grew between the first and second century, they developed their own treasuries, and people began to bring what they had set to one side to present at Sunday gatherings for worship. This is the origin of Sunday offerings, and it is more ancient than many of the things we now regard as necessary for Sunday worship!

The fact that tithing is not mentioned has caused great controversy. It is fashionable for Christians today to tithe, but we should consider the suggestion here in 1 Corinthians carefully. Paul's requirement that we put to one side what is in excess of our needs (16:2) demands good judgement on the part of the individual, but the principle is clearly important. It does not disadvantage the poor, and it places a great burden on the rich to justify what they place to one side and what they regard as essential to their living requirements. In fact, it is probably a more exacting spiritual requirement than tithing, if done with integrity.

Travel plans (16:5-9)

It is hard to follow Paul's plans here without a map, but these can be found in the back of most modern Bibles, and we can easily see that Ephesus, from where Paul wrote this letter to Corinth, was on the seaward side of what is now Turkey, facing the Aegean Sea. Corinth was across the other side of the Aegean in southern Greece, further away even than Athens. Corinth had been the farthest place on Paul's classic second missionary journey (Acts 18:1f.), but a few years later, as Paul travelled on his third missionary journey, he found himself with a successful ministry in Ephesus (see Acts 19:1f. – though he only visited there briefly on his second journey, see Acts 18:21). It was in this setting that he wrote this letter to Corinth. It is interesting to see from the later part of our passage that Apollos was apparently involved in the work at Ephesus as well (16:12). This is the extent of our knowledge of the 'large and productive doorway' (16:9) Paul said had opened to him there. Nothing would stop Paul pursuing the Gospel imperative.

There is a brief comment at the end of verse 9 which is spiritually significant. Paul noted that although he was working according to a great opportunity in Ephesus, 'there are many opponents'. Paul knew that where God was powerfully at work, there was likely to be resistance, and if we read Acts 19, we can read about both the good work and the resistance! We cannot expect our Gospel work to be an easy life, and it seems that Paul knew that if he was to do the Lord's work, he had to deal with the problems!

In addition, we can imagine that many who were settled in the churches would have wanted Paul to give them more time. Perhaps the churches of Philippi and Thessalonica in Macedonia would have been sorry to see Paul pass through (16:5 – see also Acts 19:21) after all, great things had happened the first time Paul went there (Acts 16:12f.). The journey of a man of God, however, was not to be pre-judged, and even the great man himself did not appear to have much of a grasp of what he was going to do next (16:5f.).

Timothy and Apollos (16:10-12)

If Paul was having a difficult time calling to heel the dissident elements at Corinth, who challenged his authority (1:10f), practiced litigation (ch6), and were hopelessly divided even at the Lord's table (ch.11), then he was justifiably concerned about the reception Timothy might receive. From the letters to Timothy, we have the picture of a bright but cautious young man who suffered because he was a youth in a world that revered the elderly, and also suffered physically in ways of which we are unsure. However, this does not appear to have stopped Paul sending him all over the known world, following up the work of the Gospel and requiring of him rather demanding tasks (including, for example, the selection of church leaders, possibly in the region of Ephesus, see 1 Tim 2:1f.). So, it seems that Paul was willing to send this somewhat fragile young man into the 'lion's den' of powerful people and strong opinions at Corinth (16:10); perhaps this was Paul's way of testing both the church at Corinth and Timothy. Surely if true Christian fellowship was to break out at Corinth, then proper hospitality and courtesy would be shown to Paul's emissary?

An earlier comment in 1 Corinthians (4:17) indicates the possibility that Timothy took the very letter we are now reading. Now, if Timothy was faithful to his task, then what we read in Paul's second letter to Corinth (2 Corinthians 1:19f.) indicates that the reception of the first letter at Timothy's hand must have been a torrid event. The Corinthians did not believe that Paul would come, and interpreted his lack of specific travel plans as an excuse for not coming and facing his critics. Indeed, the remarkable letter of 2 Corinthians is a result not of the success of the first letter, but its failure to deal with the problems at Corinth in general. Moreover, Timothy took the full weight of the problems on his own shoulders whilst Paul was continuing his missionary work in Ephesus. In verse 11, Paul asks that the Corinthians 'send him on his way in peace', but it can hardly have been easy. The word 'send on the way' was not a matter of saying 'goodbye' and waving. In those days, to see someone off on a long journey was a responsibility; provisions had to be given and it was civil to travel with someone as far as possible to ensure their safety before they reached a regional border. Today, we have lost that art of 'seeing off' on a long journey, but it was valued for centuries. We might well wonder how much help Timothy actually received, and whether his health did not bear up well to the strains of being Paul's aide.

Apollos was also a man of God who knew that his first call was to do the Lord's work. Some have suggested that Paul was not telling the truth when he suggests to the Corinthians that he had sought to persuade Apollos to go there. However, all this merely feeds off the modern assumption that because Paul had to correct Apollos' preaching at Ephesus (Acts 19:1f.) and because there were opposing parties supporting Paul and Apollos in Corinth, then the two must have been opponents. However, this is a bad assumption. Everywhere that Paul mentions Apollos (remember, Acts was written by Luke), he does so with affection and

commendation (see also Titus 3:13), and we have no reason to doubt Paul's honesty here. Indeed, if he was being disingenuous, it would have backfired on him very quickly, for Paul knew his letter would receive scrutiny.

The truth is surely that Paul and Apollos knew each other well, and both did the Lord's work according to the direction of the Spirit. It was the demands of the Corinthians to see their preaching 'heroes' that created the problems. They were the farthest flung of all the emerging churches, yet with all their 'gifts', it seems that they failed to generate an adequate leadership. Paul and Apollos maintained proper priorities. Apollos had told Paul he would only go to Corinth when 'he had the opportunity'; God's will came first.

Discipleship

Application

There are a number of very significant spiritual and practical issues within this text. Continuing from what we have just described, it was surely a powerful witness to the warring Corinthians to know that the leaders of their divided parties were working together for the Lord elsewhere and unable to be at their beck and call! It is surely right that those in Christian leadership should be free to respond to the call of God's Spirit. Paul and Apollos knew they were accountable to God, but they understood that they needed to explain themselves to other people as well. Paul did not just say 'we are doing God's work, it's none of your business'. He set out what he knew of his plans and indicated his own intentions, but said plainly that the Lord's call came first. The Corinthians chose not to accept Paul's explanation (see 2 Corinthians 1), but Paul was correct in his understanding of the priority of mission, and correct to seek to explain himself properly; and the problem he had in his second letter was the sole fault of the Corinthians. Leaders today can learn much from how Paul dealt with difficult church issues, and especially the way he sorted out his priorities!

The other issue strongly related to this is the notion within this passage of a leadership that was itinerant. Paul, Apollos and Timothy were clearly significant figures in the church, and each had different ministries. Only one was an apostle, another was a preacher, and yet another more of a teacher and administrator. Yet all of these three were part of the early structure that held the church together in unity. Jesus prayed for the unity of His disciples, and this was largely maintained in the early days of the church by people like Paul and Apollos who had an itinerant ministry, moving around from place to place, yet responsive to what was happening everywhere. Of course, this could only be maintained as long as such people were held in high respect by local leaders. In the course of time this office in the church became the role of the 'bishop' and was linked to the concept of 'oversight'; it was far removed from the divisive, denominational and regionalised concept of bishop used by some churches today. Under this structure, the early church was not split for centuries, despite severe strain, and it grew rapidly. We need to look more closely at what happened and why, in order to fulfil our own call to be 'one' in Christ.

Last, and by no means least, the mention of money in this passage is significant. Should we allow ourselves to be dominated by tithing, an Old Testament notion of giving linked to principles of worship superseded by Christ? Tithing is not a bad principle, but it does allow millions to give a portion of their income and feel that they have met all religious obligation. The death of Christ tells us that this is not appropriate. Christ gave all, and we should give all in return, or our faith is vanity. The only significant New Testament indicator of how to give comes in 1 Corinthians 16, and Paul suggests that from our resources we use what we justly need for life under God, and give Him all the rest. Now this leaves plenty of room for discussion about what people need in today's world appropriate for their needs, but perhaps we must have that discussion openly today, when the gap between rich and poor is frighteningly huge, even within Western countries. Whatever method of giving we decide to use, the fundamental Christian principle MUST be that everything we have belongs to God, without reservation; and let us make sure that tithing is not used as an escape clause to that offering of life.

Questions for groups

1. How is money collected in your church, and what is the position held on tithing? Does this passage help us in formulating a church policy on giving?
2. How free are we to travel where the Lord leads, and do what He asks us? Does the Lord or the world determine what we do with our lives?
3. How often and how well do we receive the visitors who come amongst us with the Lord's word? Can we cope with this idea?

Discipleship challenges

- *If you had to give away all the money you did not need in order to 'get by' comfortably, how much would you give to God each week? A great deal, or almost nothing? Try and have a discussion about this with others who might have different perspectives on this issue.*
 - *Pray for those who are God's leaders across the churches today, evangelists and also other leaders and pioneers who do God's work where they are called, and fight the spiritual enemies who try to stop them. Pray for their protection and their encouragement.*
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Final Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, I rejoice in the love You continue to show me. Help me remember the cost of that love; Your life, Your ministry, Your death, and Your resurrection. Give me the grace to respond to all You have done by offering all I have in Your service, and following You all my life. AMEN
