

## **FIRST CORINTHIANS**

### **The International Church I Corinthians 16: 1-24**

First Corinthians 16 is an example of the international flavor of the true church of Jesus Christ. Five Roman provinces are mentioned: Galatia, Judea, Macedonia, Achaia and Asia. These provinces represent different cultures and conditions - European and Eastern, Jew and Arab, Greek and Roman, urban and rural. The gospel had effectively been preached in all these areas. Why? The gospel goes across all racial and cultural backgrounds. It is effective for all kinds of people. In fact, the gospel must have an international flavor or it is not true to the command of the Lord Jesus which says, "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation" (Mark 16:15).

The airplane and electronics have shrunk the world. Never has there been a time for more cross-cultural ministry for Christians than at this present hour in the world and in the U.S.A. Cross-cultural ministry is very important for the survival of modern America. We desperately need a cross-cultural revival so that men, women, boys and girls of different races and cultures can worship in the same churches under the authority of the Lordship of Jesus Christ. We Christians have the key to both racial and economic prejudice but will we use it? Will we be obedient to Christ? Is it too late? God alone knows for sure, but we must minister cross-culturally or die as a nation.

#### **THE INTERNATIONAL CHURCH SHARES MONEY RESOURCES 16:1-4**

Now about the collection for God's people: Do what I told the Galatian churches to do. The Corinthians were very concerned and serious at first about the collection for the needy saints in Jerusalem. Many Jews in the mother-land were in poverty, probably because of social persecution for their filth and they could not work. There was also a famine. When Christians stand for Christ as they did in Jerusalem, they will be persecuted. Did you know that more Christians have been martyred for the faith in the 20th century than all the centuries of the church?

The Corinthians made a commitment to help meet this need for the suffering Jerusalem saints but they had not come through so Paul exhorted them to make good on their commitment. They were a wealthy church and should have made the pledge easily but they were stingy and were being shown up by the poor Macedonian churches. The Corinthians had taken the initiative on the pledge and now were lagging way behind (II Cor. 8:1-12; 9:1-5). The exhortation did not work because Paul still had to exhort them to give in II Corinthians 8 and 9. However, they finally did make good on their pledge (Rom. 15:26).

There are several principles here for us when it comes to giving of our monies to the Lord's work: 1) Financial support for our spiritual parents or authorities over us is a basic consideration. The gospel began in Jerusalem; 2) Meeting the physical needs of our brothers and sisters in Christ in our church and in the world is a Christian responsibility. We cannot feed the world but we can attempt to meet the needs of God's people all over the world; 3) Rifts and distrust between Christians can be eliminated or minimized by outward financial gifts given in love and for the glory of God. Jews and Gentiles had a natural distrust of One another.

There are three tremendous contributions American Christians can make to the world church today and probably for the next twenty-five years; 1) Americans can send experienced pastors to train pastors and Christian leaders in other countries; 2) Americans can write and finance written materials for national pastors and laymen all over the world; 3) Americans, who are the richest Christians in the world, can give finances to struggling churches and pastors in every part of the earth.

On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made. This verse tells us the early Christians practiced systematic giving. "Set aside" and "save up" may refer to doing this at home and then giving it in a large sum on the Lord's Day, or it may refer to putting money aside every week in the church for this cause. The word "saving up" can be translated "treasure up" so as to refer to a church treasury of some kind.

This giving was to take place "on the first day of every week" which was Sunday, the day of worship for the Christian (Acts 20:7).

They were to give "in keeping with his income" or as the Lord had prospered them, indicating the rich would be able to give more than the poor but all were to give something.

Paul wanted no collections (money issues) when he came. Money was not his goal. He wanted to build the saints not talk about money. It takes money to do God's work, but money should always follow ministry. Do ministry as unto the Lord and the money will come.

It should be noted that I Corinthians 16:1-4 and II Corinthians 8 and 9 are not the regular principles for Christian giving. The Christians probably gave a tithe (10%) to their church. The collection for the Jerusalem saints was an offering over and above the tithe (Mal. 3:8-12). This is the only good explanation as to why it was so amazing that the Macedonians who were poor could meet their commitment to the Jerusalem saints (II Cor. 8:1-5). They gave their tithe and now they gave liberally in a special offering to the Jerusalem saints.

Then, when I arrive, I will give letters of introduction to the men you approve and send them with your gift to Jerusalem. If it seems advisable for me to go also, they will accompany me. The offering to the Jerusalem saints was sizable, and in order to have financial integrity and accountability, Paul made sure the money was in the hands of reputable people (II Cor. 8:16-24).

Integrity, accountability and good management of funds is as absent today in Christian churches and organizations as generous, sacrificial giving. With proper accountability, there should never be any scandals for Christians.

## THE INTERNATIONAL CHURCH SHARES PEOPLE RESOURCES 16:5-12

After I go through Macedonia, I will come to you—for I will be going through Macedonia. Perhaps I will stay with you awhile, or even spend the winter, so that you can help me on my journey, wherever I go. I do not want to see you now and make only a passing visit; I hope to spend some time with you, if the Lord permits. Paul had an itinerant ministry to the whole church. He wanted to come to visit the Corinthians and have a significant amount of time with them so as to correct the abuses in the church and further disciple them. Paul's heart was always to disciple. He did not win people to Christ and then abandon them.

Paul wanted to avoid the harsh travel in the sea and overland in the winter months but he would come if the Lord permitted it. He made plans but God directed his steps. He would go only if God allowed it. He could never know the sovereign will of God for sure until it happened. In his heart a man plans his course, but the LORD determines his steps (Prov. 16:9). Many are the plans in a man's heart, but it is the Lord's purpose that prevails (Prov. 19:21).

Paul wanted the Corinthians to send him on his way or help on his journey. This probably implies material assistance - goods, money, traveling companions or whatever. Notice the words "wherever I go." There is an uncertainty for Paul had to leave the door open to be led by God. Sometimes we do not know the will of the Lord until it happens. Sometimes we move forward in faith allowing God to open and close doors. Wherever we go, we are to be faithful to Christ. Commit to the LORD whatever you do, and your plans will succeed (Prov. 16:3).

But I will stay on at Ephesus until Pentecost, because a great door for effective work has opened to me, and then are many who oppose me. Paul's plan was to stay in Ephesus for awhile longer. Why? God was doing a great work in Ephesus and he couldn't leave just yet (Acts 19). The whole province of Asia Minor had heard the gospel. This went on for two years, so that all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord (Acts 19:10).

At Ephesus there was great blessing and great opposition - confrontation with demonic powers, opposition by merchants led by Demetrius the silversmith and the Jewish hierarchy was challenging Paul's every move. The lesson to learn is that when we are doing God's will there will be opposition. The presence of opposition does not mean we have moved out of the will of God. Lack of opposition should cause us to ask if we are preaching the full-orbed gospel.

If Timothy comes, see to it that he has nothing to fear while he is with you, for he is carrying on the work of the Lord, just as I am. Send him on his way in peace so that he may return to me. I am expecting him along with the brothers. Timothy was also an itinerant preacher. Paul was concerned that the Corinthians might treat Timothy badly because of their negative feelings about Paul. There was also Timothy's youthfulness (I Tim. 4:12) and possibly his dry, distant personality (II Tim. 1:7). They were to send him on his way with material help. Paul and Timothy were both doing the Lord's work - co-laborers with different personalities and different gifts but both were important to the international church.

Now about our brother Apollos: I strongly urged him to go to you with the brothers. He was quite unwilling to go now, but he will go when he has the opportunity. Apollos, another itinerant minister, who previously had a strong ministry to the church at Corinth, did not feel it was the right timing to go to Corinth. His reluctance could reflect his concern to wait for things to settle down in Corinth about Paul and the abuse of spiritual gifts.

Notice Paul did not know the will of God for Apollos. Paul had desires for Apollos but Apollos did not feel the same way as Paul. God leads each individual not other individuals for that person. Apollos did not have the same spiritual vibes as Paul.

Christians who are always claiming to know God's will for some other Christian can be annoying and wrong. It also can become a control issue where one controls others by always claiming to know the will of God for others.

#### FINAL GREETINGS 16:13-21

Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be men of courage; be strong. Do everything in love. The Corinthians were to act like men, literally "adults"; that is, they were to put away spiritual immaturity which had led to so many of their spiritual problems and grow up in the Lord. The words "alert" and "stand" and "act" are all military terms to encourage Christians to resoluteness in the Faith. Christians are to be alert to demonic deception, firm in doctrine, mature in courage and strong to stand for Christ. Again Paul stresses love which is the controlling force in the Christian life. Without love we Christians are nothing.

You know that the household of Stephanas were the first converts in Achaia, and they have devoted themselves to the service of the saints. This refers to the first whole household rather than individuals to come to Christ. A whole household (adults, children and perhaps infants) devoted themselves to ministry, the service to other Christians. They were slaves to Christ and slaves to ministry. We should never underestimate the power of a whole family committed to doing ministry for the Lord Jesus Christ.

I urge you, brothers, to submit to such as these and to everyone who joins in the work and labors at it. Those who diligently work at the ministry and labor to the point of exhaustion, are to be respected and submitted to as God's true leaders. This is not dictatorial leadership but servant-leadership, leading by example and thereby gaining the respect of the saints. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave — just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many (Matt. 20:26-28). Authority for leadership is earned through humble service, not imposed by holding an office or by charismatic personality or by the size of one's bank account. As humans we often give leadership to the educated, wealthy and personality people but God looks at the labor, the effort and the example set forth to truly lead.

I was glad when Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus arrived, because they have supplied what was lacking from you. For they refreshed my spirit and yours also. Such men deserve recognition. Most likely Fortunatus and Achaicus were former slaves. If so, it shows the power of the gospel, for now the high and mighty Corinthians were to submit to them which shows the radically equalizing function of the gospel across the socioeconomic strata of society.

Through these three Christian brothers, Christ spiritually refreshed Paul. They supplied what was lacking from the Corinthians. By encouraging Paul, they were also encouraging the Corinthians.

These men deserved recognition for their ministry. This could be a command and translated, "Recognize such men!" There is a place for genuine recognition of the saints and their labors for Christ. However, flattery should not be used as a tool to get people to do what we want them to do. Recognition may be used as a motivator but not as a manipulator.

The churches in the province of Asia send you greetings. Aquila and Priscilla greet you warmly in the Lord, and so does the church that meets in their house. — Aquila and Priscilla were co-laborers at times with Paul. They were business people and moved from one province or city to another. Out of the six references in the Bible to this Christian couple, four of them mention Priscilla first (Acts 18:18-26; Rom. 16:3; II Tim. 4:19). Perhaps Priscilla was a stronger leader than Aquila or even a better Bible teacher. This implies that women were given equal status with men before the Lord and could do everything in the church except hold the office of elder.

Wherever Aquila and Priscilla went they started a house church Through this couple we see how the early church communicated, networked and cooperated. Today modern technology has made it possible for the universal church to grow closer.

Greet one another with a holy kiss. The holy kiss was an ancient custom used by Greeks and Romans and later adopted by the church at large. In some parts of the world, the holy kiss is still used regularly and others only use in liturgically.

The holy kiss was done by men kissing men and women kissing women. It was done on the cheek. If this bothers some, then a hearty handshake or a warm embrace might be used. I believe the church still should use the holy kiss as a greeting.

#### EPILOGUE 16:21-24

I, Paul, write this greeting in my own hand. Paul takes the pen from his recording secretary (amanuensis) and records his personal farewell in his own handwriting. Paul wanted the personal touch with people he loved.

If anyone does not love the Lord — a curse be on him. Those who do not love the Lord does not refer to unbelievers in general but to a certain type of unbeliever -- a person who merely professes Christ and does not actually possess Him; that is, he is not saved no matter what he professes with his lips. Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you — unless, of course, you fail the test (II Cor. 13:5)?

There is a curse on these kinds of professing Christians. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned (Gal. 1:8)! These are tough words but Paul had no time for corrupt church members who were masquerading as believers. There is a double curse on these types of phony, professing Christians.

Come, O Lord! Paul longed for the coming of the Lord Jesus which would make all present suffering pale into insignificance. I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us (Rom. 8:18). The early church had a sense of the soon coming of Christ. They looked for the second advent.

Their faithfulness to Christ was linked to the coming of the Lord at which time they would go before the Judgment Seat of Christ and receive their rewards for faithful service. Also there will be an examination of things done bad and good. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad (II Cor. 5:10).

The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you. All Christians need grace as much or more for sanctification as they did for justification. We are to be growing constantly in God's grace. But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (II Pet. 3:18).

My love to all of you in Christ Jesus. Amen. Paul ends this letter with his central theological conviction - "in Christ Jesus." Paul is not just referring to any kind of love but love which is in Christ Jesus. He loved the Corinthians with intense spiritual love, agape love, which is motivated by the love of God for Christians because they are in Christ Jesus, sharing his death for sin and life for living. He loved the Corinthians even though many were immature and carnal. Why? They were "in Christ Jesus." In Christ, the Christian can love supernaturally.

As I relinquish this pastorate of eleven years with HBF, my prayer for each one of you is that you will all love the Lord Jesus with all your heart, soul, mind and strength, that you will stand fast in the inspired and infallible teachings of scripture, that you will be constantly looking for the return of the Lord Jesus Christ, that you will bask in the sovereign grace of God for your sanctification as well as justification, that you will take the gospel of Christ to the four corners of the earth, making whatever sacrifices are necessary to be deeply involved in evangelism at home and in the world, and that you will continue to pray for the lost, for the saints and for me and Carol as we seek to please Christ in whatever He has for us in the future.

My closing words to HBF are those of the Apostle Paul: Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be men of courage; be strong. Do everything in love (I Cor. 16: 13-14).