

“AND BY THE WAY, DON’T FORGET…”
1 CORINTHIANS 16:1-24

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Paul wrapped up his letter with some final matters: instructions on collections; general exhortations; and final greetings.

INSTRUCTIONS ON COLLECTIONS (16:1-4)

Due to a famine in Judea, churches in other areas took up collections to meet the needs of Judean Christians. Corinth was among those contributing churches, so Paul took this opportunity to guide their famine relief mobilization.

16:1. Paul began this section with the phrase: “now about” (*peri de*) (“now concerning” NASB, NRSV, NKJV). This phrase indicates that Paul replied to questions raised in a letter which the Corinthians had sent to him (see 7:1; compare 7:25; 8:1; 12:1; 16:1,12). They had asked about the proper procedures for **the collection for God’s people in Jerusalem** (16:3). Paul gave them the same directions he gave **the Galatian churches** (16:1) — the Corinthians did not bear a unique burden.

Famines had repeatedly struck Judea and terrible economic conditions had followed. The church survived the first famine (ca. A.D. 46-47), having been warned of its approach by Agabus (Acts 11:28), but the next famines took their tolls. So, Paul called on Gentile churches to remember their spiritual indebtedness to believers in Jerusalem (compare Rom. 15:26-27).

Paul helped deliver relief to Judean Christians during the first famine (Acts 11:29-30), and evidently did the same in the latter famines. His gospel preaching often overshadowed this dimension of his ministry, but relief of the poor was a critical aspect of his and the church’s work (compare Gal. 2:10).

16:2. Paul suggested a simple method for gathering funds. The Corinthians were to take a collection **on the first day of every week**, the day on which early Christians gathered for worship and fellowship (Acts 20:7). Many interpreters have also drawn a connection between the **first day** and **the Lord’s day** (Rev. 1:10).

Paul wanted the Corinthians to offer money for the poor as a regular part of their corporate worship. Following the example of the early church, Christians throughout the centuries have collected alms for the poor as a regular part of their worship.

Paul also insisted that **each one** contribute. He expected every Christian in Corinth to give to the collection **in keeping with his income**. Paul required proportional giving. He did not state any particular amount or specific percentage. The Old Testament practice of tithing (Lev. 27:30-31; Num. 18:21-28; Deut. 12:6-17; 14:22-28; Mal. 3:8-10) probably guided the apostle's words. Even in the Old Testament, believers were to give according to their means rather than according to a set rate. Elsewhere, Paul insisted that a heart of cheer and gladness accompany Christian giving (2 Cor. 9:7). To give grudgingly is not to fulfill the believer's obligation to give.

The church was to be involved in **saving up** the collection, much like the storehouses of the Old Testament temple (Neh. 10:38-39; Mal. 3:10). When Paul came he did not want to be involved in gathering money himself. He wanted **no collections** when he arrived. He simply wanted to receive the money already gathered so that it could be taken quickly to Jerusalem.

16:3. Paul was not about to assume the responsibility of transporting this money himself. He showed great practical wisdom in at least two ways here. First, he knew that many accusations and temptations would come his way if he took the money himself (see 2 Cor. 8:20-21). So, he said that he would **give letters of introduction to men** the Corinthians **approve**[d]. Such a courier is mentioned in 2 Corinthians 8:18-19. Paul planned to provide letters of recommendation so that the believers in Jerusalem would know it was safe to receive money from the couriers (compare Acts 9:2; 15:23; 22:5; Rom. 16:1; 2 Cor. 3:1-3).

Beyond this, Paul did not appoint men to carry the money because he wanted the Corinthians to **approve** a set of couriers, men they trusted. Paul knew that trust was important in this process, so rather than assert his authority, he gave the Corinthians the responsibility of choosing their representatives.

16:4. Finally, Paul added that the couriers could **accompany** him to Jerusalem **if** such action appeared to be **advisable** when it came time to transport the collection. Paul could not anticipate the circumstances that he and they might face at his arrival in Corinth. So, he wisely left the matter open-ended.

GENERAL EXHORTATIONS (16:5-18)

Paul briefly touched on a number of matters that were important to him. These issues differed from one another in many ways, but all revealed some of Paul's more personal interests.

16:5. Paul reflected on his travel plans (16:5-9). He hoped eventually **to come to** the Corinthians after going **through Macedonia**. For the time being he remained in **Ephesus** (16:8).

Paul worried that he might meet with resistance in Corinth (1 Cor. 4:18-21). He may

have written 1 Corinthians partly to prevent anticipated problems. Scholarship generally agrees that he wrote 1 Corinthians from Ephesus on the outbound leg of his third missionary journey, probably around A.D. 55 near the end of his stay in Ephesus.

The book of Acts reveals that Paul wanted to travel from Ephesus to Jerusalem after going through Macedonia and Achaia (Acts 19:21). Corinth was in the Roman province Achaia. These plans may reflect Paul's intentions as stated in 1 Corinthians, since Acts 19:22 records that Paul planned to stay in Asia (Ephesus?) "a little longer" (compare 1 Cor. 16:7-9), and that he dispatched Timothy and Erastus to Macedonia (compare 1 Cor. 16:10). Corinth was not in Macedonia, but Achaia (immediately south of Macedonia). Thus, Timothy's trip to Macedonia made it possible that he might also visit Corinth (compare "**If Timothy comes**" [16:10]). Paul later traveled through Macedonia into Greece (probably referring to Achaia, since Macedonia was simply northern Greece), and thus perhaps to Corinth (Acts 20:1-6), but this trip probably took place after he wrote 2 Corinthians.

16:6. Paul also shared his human need with the Corinthians. He wanted to spend **the winter** with them, allowing them in this way to **help** him on his **journey**. "**Help me on my journey**" translates the Greek word *propempe*, a technical term for providing aid to travelers in order to ensure safety and success on a journey. *Propempe* included provision of such things as food, clothing, money, and traveling companions (compare Acts 15:3; 20:38; 21:5; Rom. 15:24; 1 Cor. 16:11; 2 Cor. 1:16; Tit. 3:13; 3 John 1:6).

Paul had previously refused payment while laboring in Corinth (9:3-18), and this refusal had caused dissension among them. Paul's detractors probably used his refusal to challenge his apostleship. This verse may represent a policy change. Since his apostleship no longer should have been at issue, he welcomed their physical help as useful to his missionary work.

16:7. Paul had not delayed his visit because he was indifferent to the Corinthians' needs. On the contrary, he was waiting until he could **spend some time with** them. He qualified his plans with the recognition that he would do so only **if the Lord permit[ed]** (see also Jas. 4:13-15).

16:8-9. Instead of rushing to Corinth, Paul felt it right to **stay on at Ephesus until Pentecost, because a great door for effective work** had **opened** for him. Paul's ministry in Ephesus was succeeding, which indicated that he should remain there.

Paul also saw resistance from the world as an indication that he should stay for a while. Paul knew that those involved in godly ministry will suffer persecution from the world (2 Tim. 3:12). Jesus taught this too (John 15:18-20). So, Paul stayed in Ephesus because there were **many who oppose[d]** him. Paul demonstrated great sensitivity to the Holy Spirit's work, being willing to modify his plans as providence directed him.

16:10. Paul's next remarks concerned his student and friend **Timothy** (see also 4:17), the pastor and missionary to whom he wrote 1 & 2 Timothy. Though the timing is

uncertain, Timothy did visit the Corinthian church (Acts 19:22).

16:11. Paul apparently feared that some Corinthians might not welcome Timothy. So, he ordered the church to ensure that Timothy had **nothing to fear**, and to **accept him**. Timothy's youth may have caused some difficulties (1 Tim. 4:12), and his close association with Paul may have biased Paul's opponents against him. Timothy was shy (2 Tim. 1:7), and probably in bad health (1 Tim. 5:23), but he was doing **the work of the Lord** and was to be treated well.

Paul also encouraged the church to **send him on his way in peace**. Apparently, Paul feared that some in the Corinthian church might hinder Timothy's ministerial travels. Therefore, Paul added that he was **expecting him along with the brothers**.

Which traveling **brothers** Paul had in mind are unclear. According to Luke Timothy traveled with Erastus (Acts 19:22), and Paul mentioned Timothy in the company of others (Rom. 16:21-23). Paul may have referred to these people, or to Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus (see 16:17), or to people unknown by name. In any case, Paul expected Timothy's return prior to his own departure for Corinth.

16:12. "Now about" ("but concerning" NASB; "now concerning" NRSV, NKJV) introduced Paul's next remarks. Paul responded with this phrase (*peri de*) throughout this epistle when answering the Corinthians' specific questions (see 7:1,25; 8:1; 12:1; 16:1,12).

Paul's response concerned **Apollos** (compare Acts 18:24-28). Apollos ministered in Corinth after Paul had planted the church (3:6). Paul had already rebuked some Corinthians for inappropriate loyalty to Apollos (1:12; 3:4-6,22).

This passage does not reveal the Corinthians' question about Apollos. Perhaps some wanted Apollos to pastor the church. Paul responded quite positively, despite the trouble caused by those overly loyal to Apollos. He referred to Apollos as a **brother** to indicate his affection and high regard for him. Paul had even **strongly urged** Apollos to go to Corinth. Clearly, he was confident that Apollos agreed with him about the divisions in Corinth, and recognized that Apollos had not been at fault. Apollos was also to travel **with the brothers**. Again, precisely who these **brothers** were is unknown (see 16:10-11).

To forestall any misunderstandings, Paul explained that he had urged Apollos to go to Corinth, but Apollos had been **quite unwilling to go**. Yet, Paul assured the Corinthians that Apollos would see them **when he had the opportunity**. Paul's strong urging of Apollos demonstrates that Paul understood the importance of godly church leaders and leadership, perhaps especially when people align themselves improperly with those same leaders.

16:13. This verse has little logical connection to its context. Paul appeared about to close this section with some final exhortations, but decided to say more in 16:14-18

(compare other Pauline non-sequiturs in Rom. 16:1,17; 1 Cor. 1:16).

Paul gave five central Christian exhortations. First, he told the Corinthians to **be on guard** (“be on alert” NASB; “keep alert” NRSV). In the New Testament this terminology frequently describes the expectation of Christ’s return (e.g. Matt. 24:42; 25:13; Mark 13:35,37; 1 Thess. 5:6; Rev 16:15), so Paul may have wanted them to look vigilantly for the Second Coming. Being “on guard” implies a lifestyle of holiness and service to Christ and his kingdom. Paul also used this language in reference to false teachers (Acts 20:31) and alertness in prayer (Col. 4:2).

Second, Paul encouraged the Corinthians to **stand firm in the faith**. He frequently used this terminology to indicate the constancy with which believers should persevere in the faith during adversity and strife (Gal. 5:1; Phil. 1:27; 4:1; 1 Thess. 3:8; 2 Thess. 2:15). The early Christian church faced many challenges that made it difficult to remain faithful to Christ, including such blatant challenges to the gospel as the one the Corinthians experienced regarding the resurrection (15:12-13).

Third and fourth, Paul told the Corinthians to be **men of courage** and to **be strong**. These expressions derive from several Old Testament passages in which men were encouraged to be strong and courageous as they faced opposition (Deut. 31:6,7,23; Josh. 1:6,7,9,18; 10:25; 2 Sam. 10:12; 1 Chr. 19:13; 22:13; 28:20). The Psalms also encourage these virtues (Pss. 27:14; 30:25). God calls Christians lives that incite opposition from the world. His people enter a spiritual war in which opponents seek believers’ destruction and fight against believers’ goals (John 15:18-19; 17:14-21; 1 John 3:13). Thus, it is essential that believers be courageous and strong. Christians can prevail because Christ has already overcome the world (John 16:33).

16:14. Fifth, Paul wanted the Corinthians always to show **love in everything**. This reminder was very important for a church riddled with strife and pride. Paul had exalted love as the highest ideal (13:13), and he reiterated it here so that the Corinthians would not forget it.

16:15. Paul could have ended this section here, but apparently the mention of **love** in 16:14 reminded him of several other issues (16:15-18). Thus, he urged the church to respect the leadership of particular men. In doing so, he appealed to the Corinthians one last time as **brothers** because he so intensely desired that they listen to and obey him (see also 1:10,11,26; 2:1; 3:1; 4:6; 7:24,29; 10:1; 11:33; 12:1; 14:6,20,26,39; 15:1,31,50,58).

First, he commended the **household of Stephanas**, who were among the earliest Christian converts **in Achaia** (see also 1:16). The NIV and NRSV call them **the first converts**, but literally Paul called them the “firstfruits” (“first fruits” NASB; “firstfruits” NKJV). This term derives from Old Testament ceremonies in which the first portion of a harvest was given to God as a representation of the entire harvest to follow (Lev. 23:9-11,15-17; Deut. 26:1-11). Paul had already used this analogy to describe Christians’ union with Christ in his resurrection (15:20,23). Here it indicated not only that Stephanas

and his household were the first converts, but also that they were united in Christ to all who converted after them. The household of Stephanas had been **devoted . . . to the service of the saints**. The Corinthians and other believers had benefited from their faithful work in many ways, and owed them a great spiritual debt.

16:16. For this reason, Paul urged his readers **to submit to such as these**. Stephanas was just one of many who had served the church faithfully. So, Paul exhorted the Corinthians to show gratitude by submitting to **everyone who join[ed] in the work and labor[ed] at it**. Proper church leadership is difficult and taxing. Their long hours of toil and sacrifice often go unrecognized. For this reason, New Testament writers exhorted believers to encourage and honor their leaders (1 Tim. 5:17; Heb. 13:17; 1 Pet. 5:5). Paul did not order blind obedience or indiscriminating submission — every leader is accountable to Scriptural standards (1 Cor. 4:1-2; Tit. 1:9; 1 Tim. 5:19).

16:17-18. In 1:11 Paul had reported that some members of Chloe’s household had brought informal reports about the Corinthian church. No doubt, Paul’s belief in the validity of these reports spurred his negative comments from time to time in this epistle (1:10-12; 3:3,18-21; 4:7-8,18; 5:1; 6:1,15; 11:18; 15:12). Nevertheless, this epistle also contains positive encouragements (i.e. 1:4-7; 11:2), which may have derived from the letter Stephanas and his company delivered to Paul (7:1). Their report seems to have been more complete. Paul **was glad** when they came **because they . . . supplied what was lacking from** the Corinthian congregation. The problems at Corinth troubled Paul, and he grieved for the church. Yet, the company of leaders had encouraged Paul about the church in Corinth, and **refreshed** him just as they refreshed the Corinthians with encouraging words.

As a result, these **men deserve[d] recognition**. From Paul’s special interest in the treatment of these men, it would seem that he feared the church might not receive them well. This worry may have been rooted in the church’s divisions, and in Stephanas’ association with Paul himself. Church leaders often become bitter and negative because they constantly deal with problems and troubles. It is rare and precious when leaders can keep their eyes fixed on the positive work of God in the church. Paul wanted the Corinthian congregation to be encouraged as he had been.

FINAL GREETINGS (16:19-24)

Paul finally closed this letter. He included elements typical of his closings, such as greetings, blessings, and a brief note written in his own hand.

16:19-20a. Paul mentioned a number of Christians who sent greetings to the Corinthian church in order to remind them that many other believers stood united with the Christians at Corinth.

First, the **churches in the province of Asia** sent **greetings**. In this context, “**Asia**” referred to the Roman province of Asia, which occupied the western portion of modern

Turkey, including Ephesus, from which Paul wrote this letter. Paul himself ministered throughout Asia. He and his disciples had established churches in Ephesus, Colosse, Laodicia, and Hierapolis (see Acts 19:10; 20:4; 21:29; Eph. 6:21; Col 4:12-13; Philem. 1-2).

Second, **Aquila and Priscilla** greeted the Corinthians (compare Rom. 16:3-5; 2 Tim. 4:19). **Aquila** was a Jewish man who had lived in Rome with his wife **Priscilla**, but both had been evicted from Rome by Emperor Claudius around A.D. 49 (Acts 18:2-3). They lodged Paul during his visit in Corinth, and traveled to Ephesus where they met Apollos and taught him of Christ (Acts 18:24-26).

Third, **the church that met in their house** sent greetings. Early Christian churches met in homes. Aquila and Priscilla had home churches in Ephesus and Rome (Rom. 16:5). Nympha and Philemon also held churches in their homes (Col 4:15; Philem. 2).

Fourth, Paul extended the greetings of **all the brothers** in Ephesus. All the believers who were with Paul at the time offered warm affections and respect to the believers at Corinth.

16:20b. In light of the unity of faith and affection expressed in these various greetings, Paul encouraged the Corinthians to continue the same expressions of love to each other, in part by **greet[ing] one another with a holy kiss** (compare Matt. 26:48-49; Mark 14:44-45; Luke 7:45; 15:20; 22:47-48; Acts 20:37; Rom. 16:16; 2 Cor. 13:12; 1 Thess. 5:26; 1 Pet. 5:14). This custom may sound unusual, but family members and beloved friends commonly exchanged kisses in the Mediterranean world of Paul's day. Most scholarly research suggests that the custom was for men to touch each other's cheeks in greeting. The adjective "**holy**" precludes the possibility that the kiss was sexual or romantic.

16:21. Paul added a brief **greeting in his own hand**. He often dictated to his letters to a secretary (compare Rom. 16:22), but characteristically added a personal note in his own hand (Gal. 6:11; Col. 4:18; 2 Thess. 3:17; Philem. 19). At times, he did this to authenticate a letter. Here, however, it was to show his personal affection for the Corinthian believers.

16:22. As a finale, Paul added a curse and a blessing. He cursed **anyone** who did **not love the Lord**. Similarly, in Galatians 1:9 Paul cursed all who taught other gospels than the one he had preached. Paul knew that most people within the Corinthian church believed the gospel sincerely (1:6-8), but also that every church contains some deceivers and liars. He declared that the Lord curses people in the church if they do not love him sincerely.

The realization that such deceivers infiltrate the church caused Paul to cry out, "**Come, O Lord.**" This cry was his prayer that Christ would return to punish those who troubled the church through their pretense of faith.

16:23. Paul hoped good things for the Corinthian church. So, he offered a blessing over them, praying that **the grace of the Lord Jesus** would **be with** them. He regularly closed his letters with blessings like this (Rom. 16:20,24; 2 Cor. 13:14; Gal. 5:18; Eph. 6:24; Phil. 4:23; Col. 4:18; 1 Thess. 5:28; 2 Thess. 3:18; 1 Tim. 6:21; 2 Tim. 4:22; Tit. 3:15; Philem. 1:25).

16:24. In a similarly positive vein, Paul declared his deep affection for the Corinthians. He sent his **love to all of them in Christ Jesus**. Here, Paul practiced the love to which he had exhorted the Corinthians many times. To confirm his love for them, he added "**Amen**," meaning, "may it be so."

DIGGING DEEPER

A. Collection (16:1)

God has great concern for the poor (Deut. 10:18; 1 Sam. 2:8; Pss. 68:10; 72:12-14; 112:9; 113:7; 140:12; Prov. 14:20-21,31; 21:13; 22:9,22-23; 28:27; 29:7; 31:10,20; Ezek. 16:49; Dan. 4:27; Amos 4:1; Matt. 11:5; 19:21; Mark 10:21; Luke 4:18; 6:20; 7:22; 18:22; 2 Cor. 9:9). As a result, he commanded his people to care for the poor in both the Old Testament (Exod. 22:22-27; Deut. 14:29; 15:6-11; 24:10-22; 26:12-13; 27:19; Isa. 1:17; 3:14-15; 10:1-3; Jer. 5:28-29; 7:6-7; 22:3-4; Ezek. 18:10-13; 22:29-31; Amos 5:11-12; Zech. 7:9-10; Mal. 3:5) and the New Testament (Luke 14:12-14; Gal. 2:10; 1 Tim. 6:17-19; Jas. 1:27; 2:1-17). The New Testament church shared this concern (Acts 2:44-45; 4:34-35; 6:1-3; 2 Cor. 9:1-15; Gal. 2:10; 1 Tim. 5:16; 1 John 3:17). So, when famines struck Judea, the church rallied to care for the poor by taking up a collection (Acts 11:28-30; Rom. 15:26-27; 1 Cor. 16:1; 2 Cor. 8:1-5).

Judea and other parts of the Mediterranean world experienced famines frequently, either due to flooding, drought, or other harsh weather. Several famines plagued this area somewhere between A.D. 46 and 54. Paul referred to the last of these. Conditions in Corinth were also bad, but the Corinthians evidently had enough food to survive. Paul did not seem to imply in 11:18-22 that the poor Corinthians might starve to death. He did not expect the Corinthians to give beyond their means, but he probably wanted them to give whatever they could spare.

B. Own hand (16:21)

Authors in the ancient world often used amanuenses, secretaries who wrote down what the authors told them to write. Amanuenses sometimes had freedom to write in their own words the ideas the authors related to them, while other times they were more strictly bound to write these things verbatim. It cannot be known to what degree the New Testament authors allowed their amanuenses this type of freedom, but one may be certain that the New Testament authors did not send out anything the amanuenses had written without first approving it. Not only did Paul make explicit use of amanuenses (Rom. 16:22; Gal. 6:11; Col. 4:18; 2 Thess. 3:17; Philem. 19), but Peter did as well (1 Pet. 5:12). Paul often chose to add a personal touch (and a mark of authenticity) by

writing a bit in his own handwriting at the end of the amanuensis' work.

ISSUES FOR DISCUSSION

1. Who was to contribute in the collection? How much were they to collect? How often? Why were the Corinthians to take up a collection?
2. Why should the church be involved in meeting the needs of others? How often should it do so? How much should Christians give for the needs of others?
3. Do you personally give money or food or clothes to help those in need? Why or why not? How often do you do this? How much do you give? Do you continually keep the needs of others in mind, or do you remember them only occasionally? Does your church have any regular programs and/or funds to care for the needy?
4. Why should Christians show hospitality? How should Christians show hospitality? Do you ever volunteer your home for hospitable purposes? Why or why not? Does your church encourage or provide lodging for traveling Christians or ministers?
5. How do you determine where and when you will participate in ministry? When God opens doors for you, do you take advantage of the opportunities. Are there open doors to ministry in your life right now that you are not utilizing? If so, why are you not?
6. What does it mean to stand firm in the faith, and to be courageous and strong? Why did Paul group these three things with a command to love? How do we obey Paul's command to love? Is it something we simply need to do, or must we also feel it?
7. How can leaders lead by serving? Are the leaders in your church "servants," or do they more closely resemble elitists? Do the people in your church joyfully submit to leaders who act as servants?
8. How can modern churches encourage one another? Does your church actively extend encouragement to other churches? Why or why not? Are there churches that your church would not consider encouraging? Why? In your mind, is this good or bad?
9. When Paul wrote, "Come, O Lord!" what did he mean? Why did he write this? Do you find it somewhat puzzling or surprising? Is this the normal feeling you see expressed by people who want Jesus to come back quickly?
10. How does chapter 16 relate to the earlier chapters of the letter? Does it seem to conclude the letter well, or does it seem like Paul just "stopped"? Why?
11. Does knowing that Paul always concluded his letters with blessings make this

ending seem trite and formulaic, or do you think Paul really meant what he said?
Why?