

Chapter 16

The Essentials of an Effective Ministry

Here are the final instructions to the church at Corinth as this letter comes to an end. These are some of the essentials that make for a well-rounded overall ministry.

Participate in Giving to the Needy and the Poor

Verse 1—The Corinthians may have asked about giving and this chapter is Paul's answer *now concerning the collection for the saints* who we will learn are the poor ones living in Jerusalem.

- *As I directed the churches of Galatia, so do you also.* James, Peter, and John had encouraged Paul and Barnabas to remember the poor when they were in Jerusalem (Galatians 2:9-10).
- Here is some background:
 - (1) Barnabas was the first to take an interest in Paul (Acts 9:27). In Acts 11:25-30 he sought for Paul to labor with him in Antioch from where they traveled to take gifts to the elders in Jerusalem on behalf of the poor there. Paul's concern for the welfare of the poor must have begun with this association.
 - (2) The leaders in Jerusalem urged Paul to care for the poor (Galatians 2:7, 9-10). Paul even preached that one's life should be marked by generosity toward the poor (Galatians 6:10; Romans 12:13; Ephesians 4:28).
 - (3) He faithfully instructed Gentile believers to contribute to needs of poor in Jerusalem (Romans 15:25-27).

Verse 2—The procedure for doing so was, on the first day of the week (Sunday) which was the traditional day of worship for the early church *each one of you is to put aside and save.*

- The Lord had not commanded to meet on first day of the week, but it quickly became customary.
- Paul's counsel amounted to, set aside a little regularly now so you will not have to make a major withdrawal from your bank account later *as he may prosper, so that no collections be made when I come.*
- The amount of giving was up to the giver. Giving is an individual responsibility before God. Each believer was encouraged to set savings aside until a large enough amount accumulated.
- Also, there is no indication of giving ten percent because that is not the standard of New Testament giving.

Verse 3—Paul planned to send a representative from each of the contributing churches, or possibly groups of churches, to Jerusalem with the gift *when I arrive, whomever you may approve, I will send them with letters to carry your gift to Jerusalem.*

- The letters he spoke of may have been letters of introduction from himself, since it appears that at this time he did not plan to make this trip himself.
- Such a procedure would guarantee that the money would arrive safely and that people would perceive the whole project as honest.

Verse 4—Paul left open the possibility that he would go with the representatives carrying the gift to Jerusalem, *and if it is fitting for me to go also, they will go with me.*

- After he wrote this letter, he decided to go (Romans 15:25-26) and indeed went (Acts 20:16, 22; 21:17; 24:17).

Application

There was no mention of tithing, of which the Mosaic Law required the Israelites to give nearly a third of their income and produce. The church is not under the Law of Moses today, so there is no apostolic command to do so. The principle New Testament practice is storehouse giving, where believers set aside some of their income to make it available for the work of the kingdom. In addition to this passage, those principles are taught in 2 Corinthians 8–9.

Plan for the Future But be Flexible

Verse 5—Paul’s travel plans were tentative to some extent. At the time he wrote, Paul planned to head north from Ephesus and then spend some time in Macedonia, *but I will come to you after I go through Macedonia, for I am going through Macedonia.*

- Travel makes an important contribution to the work of God’s kingdom around the world.

Verse 6—He had hoped that *perhaps I will stay with you, or even spend the winter.*

- Originally, he had intended to visit briefly on the way to Macedonia (2 Corinthian 1:15-16).
- But he revised those plans for afterward, and for a longer stay through winter.
- The reason for these plans was *so that you may send me on my way wherever I may go*, possibly wanting the Corinthians to financially support him on his journey.

Application

Plans are proposals we make for doing or achieving something. The Bible encourages us to make plans (Proverbs 21:5), as long as they do not produce anxiety or worry and we understand they are subject to God’s sovereignty. If so, plans can guide us in decisions to accomplish things, while keeping us from competing with God whenever those plans must change.

Verse 7—Apparently, Paul changed his mind about visiting the Corinthians because of winter conditions and because it made no sense to pay the Corinthians a brief visit *for I do not wish to see you now just in passing* due to their significant problems *for I hope to remain with you for some time.*

- But Paul did not presently know for sure what God’s will was *if the Lord permits.*
- Paul eventually did spend the winter in Corinth, but it was the winter after the one when he expected to be there, the winter of 57-58 rather than 56-57 (cf. Acts 20:2-3; Romans 16:1, 23).

Verse 8—For the time being, and due to Pentecost, Paul decided to stay on in Ephesus for now, *but I will remain in Ephesus until Pentecost*, where both opportunities and opposition were great.

Verse 9—The reason he is staying is *for a wide door for effective service has opened* (ἀνεῳχεν is literally *stands open*) to me and is a metaphor for opportunity.

- The word *effective* denotes the wide scope of the open door. Paul’s ministry had great results. It was a great opportunity for effective work.
- Paul remained in Ephesus for three years because of this opportunity to preach the Word. *And there are many adversaries* did not deter him. He did not regard adversaries there as an indication of a closed door or as a sign that God wanted him to move on to more comfortable ministry.
- He followed his own advice and remained immovable and abounding in the work of the Lord in Ephesus.

Pursue What You Believe to be the Correct Course of Action

Verse 10—In the meantime, Paul was about to send Timothy to Corinth (1 Corinthians 4:17), and this visit must be facilitated by compassion and cooperation *now if Timothy comes, see that he is with you without cause to be afraid*.

- Evidently, Timothy's relative youth tended to make some people look down on him, and he tended to be fearful.
- Paul advised the Corinthians, who apparently like to judge external appearances, to give him the respect he deserved, *for he is doing the Lord's work, as I also am*.

Verse 11—*So let no one despise him*, especially since the Corinthian church may have been tempted to look down upon Timothy, possibly due to his youth. The Corinthian believers could be brutal.

- Instead, *send him on his way in peace* (εἰρήνη tranquility, harmony), *so that he may come to me*. Paul wanted Timothy to return refreshed and in good spirits and this admonition was a way to protect Timothy while he was in Corinth.
- Paul anticipated Timothy coming back to him with other associates such as Titus and Erastus to be briefed about the situation at Corinth, *for I expect him with the brethren*.

Verse 12—Evidently, the Corinthian church asked about the possibility of the gifted Alexandrian, Apollos, coming back to Corinth.

- *But concerning Apollos our brother, I encouraged him greatly to come to you with the brethren*.
- It seems that Paul and Apollos were perfectly friendly with each other. Paul had no authority over Apollos to tell him when and where to go but he encouraged him to do so.
- *But it was not at all his desire to come now, but he will come when he has opportunity*. We do not know why Apollos did not want to revisit Corinth with Timothy or whether he ever did visit that city again.

Practice Diligently those Things that Bring Strength

Verse 13: In absence of powerful personalities, like Paul and Apollos, they must learn to stand up and be counted *be on the alert, stand firm in the faith, act like men* (ἀνδρίζεσθε to act manly, be brave), *be strong*.

- They had asserted themselves, when should have shown restraint (1 Corinthians 6:1ff).
- They were passive, when should have purged evil in church (1 Corinthians 5:1-8).
- Now with the issues clear, the time had come for them to act.
- Pointing out wrongs needing correction, they must change.
- So here, in one final charge, he says act on it, do what is right. No more complacency—carry out your calling.

Verse 14: Above all, love should motivate and mark them (chapter 13). *Let all that you do be done in love*.

- This was the greatest need of this church. Love must especially be the controlling principle in the midst of problems.

Point Out Godly Leaders and Acknowledge Them

Verse 15—Stephanus and his family were Paul's first converts in Achaia, the province in which Corinth stood, *now I urge you, brethren you know the household of Stephanas that they were the first fruits of Achaia*.

- The *first fruits* indicated this household were the first converts. This term referred to the first part of the harvest.
- They had given themselves unselfishly to serving the Corinthians *and that they have*

devoted themselves for ministry to the saints.

Verse 16: Paul urged that his readers appreciate Stephanus and his family for their ministry and not ignore them but submit humbly to them, *that you also be in subjection to such men.*

- They should treat others such as them with similar honor *and to everyone who helps in the work and labors.*
- Service, not status, should be the basis for honor in the church.

Application

It is appropriate to appreciate God's servants. Servanthood is the special badge of honor on the kingdom of God. When we are grateful for the service of others, then every individual is important to us. Don't overlook the servants in your life or around you. Each one is also seen by God.

Verse 17—Stephanus had recently visited Paul in Ephesus with the two other Corinthian brothers the apostle named. *I rejoice over the coming of Stephanas and Fortunatus and Achaicus.*

- Notice that each individual is specifically named, not just incorporated in some type of group.
- The reason Paul rejoiced is *because they have supplied what was lacking on your part by filling any deficiency that the Corinthian church had.*

Verse 18—These men committed themselves to encouraging Paul, *for they have refreshed (ἀνέπαυσαν to recover, to calm) my spirit and yours.*

- These people had all ministered refreshingly to Paul, as they typically did in Corinth.
- *Therefore, acknowledge such men.* Paul wanted the Corinthians to be sure to recognize them too.

Closing Greetings

Verse 19—The letter began to conclude with a series of standard greetings *the churches of Asia greet you.* Some of these churches are listed in Revelation chapters two and three.

- *Aquila and Prisca greet you heartily in the Lord.* The husband and wife Aquila and Priscilla were former Jews who became Christians and developed into a mighty ministry team. Paul stayed at their house in Corinth for a year and a half (Acts 18:1-3). Then they moved to Ephesus with Paul, settling in the city where they had a church in their house (Acts 18:2, 18-21, 26).
- Greetings from Aquila and Priscilla were more personal, since they were part of the church in Corinth. Their house became a meeting place for the church (cf. Romans 16:5) *with the church that is in their house.*

Verse 20—The holy kiss, because saints exchanged it, was a common practice among believers, and it still is today in some parts of the world. *All the brethren greet you. Greet one another with a holy kiss.*

- A case is never made for this type of greeting in the Bible, so we are free to give warm greetings in many kinds of ways including handshakes, hugs, or high fives.

Verse 21—*The greeting is in my own hand—Paul.*

- Paul customarily dictated his letters, and a secretary wrote them down (Romans 16:22).
- However, he usually added a word of greeting at the end in his own hand, that authenticated his epistles as coming from him (Galatians 6:11; Colossians 4:18; 2 Thessalonians 3:17).

Verse 22—Paul cannot quite give up the urgency of the letter, so he interrupts things with one final word of warning to those who have been causing him grief—*if anyone does not love the Lord, he is to be accursed.*

- The word for *love* here is not the normal word *agape* (love without reciprocity) but the word *phileo* (love based on reciprocity). The later term carries the idea of affection and adoration.
- So the Corinthians were to *let all that you do be done in love (agape)* (1 Corinthians 15:14) as well as have affection for the Lord, otherwise *he is to be accursed*.
- This is a strong condemnation and may suggest that such a person should be excluded from the Christian fellowship.
- *Maranatha* is a prayer for the coming of the Lord back to earth which here, near the end of the letter, sums up the Christian hope.

Verse 23—Paul concluded this strong but loving epistle with a prayerful benediction of God’s, grace *the grace of the Lord Jesus be with you*, which the Corinthian church desperately needed among themselves.

Verse 24: Paul also added assurance of his own love for all the believers in Corinth, not just those who supported him, *my love be with you all in Christ Jesus. Amen*.

- This is the only letter of Paul that ends with expressing love to his readers.
- After all the rebuking he emphasized, it was based in love for them.

Application

1. We should learn the value of a visit. Here are contributions of personal visits from Stephanus and his companions bring news to Paul, Timothy brings a report, and Apollos will bring further instruction.
2. We should understand the value of godly leadership. Proven maturity leads by serving. Recognize those servant leaders and value them.
3. We should make plans, that are flexible enough to change, and not so rigid that they become an object or worry. Be willing to adapt your plans if other unexpected opportunities or circumstances require that.
4. Set aside some of your regular income to feed the poor, and give to those doing the work of the ministry. Be a generous giver.