

Prayers

To God

Pray with courage, and ask the Lord to help you with what is on your heart. Trust in His power for all things.

For myself

Father God, You have been generous to me, and I have received much from Your hands. Create in me a heart full of love and compassion, ready to be generous to others and rejoicing in Your power. Give me the courage to open up my life to others and become an example of the Kingdom at work on earth. Let me not be afraid of the Gospel call on my life I pray: AMEN

For others

Seek the Lord's will for your church and for your friends within it. Pray earnestly for God's grace to become evident in people's lives.

Meditation

(a reflection based on Romans 5:1-5)

Brother, sister, and all you of faith; Peace.
May peace be yours, by faith, by the Spirit.

Peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,
An open pathway to grace outpoured.

Peace to share in the hope of God's glory,
The perfection of all things in Christ.

Peace, when all things work together for good;
Suffering, endurance, good character, and hope.

Peace, because hope can never disappoint us
For love has already been poured out on us.

Peace which comes from the blessing of God,
And by His Spirit, which gives us new life!

Bible Passage

1 Corinthians 16:1-24

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.

¹³ Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, be brave, be strong. ¹⁴ Let everything you do be done in love.

¹⁵ Fellow believers, you know that the household of Stephanas were the first converts in Achaia and they have given themselves to minister to the saints; I appeal to you ¹⁶ therefore to submit to such people and all those who co-operate with them and work hard. ¹⁷ I am glad about the arrival of Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus, since they have given me what you could not; ¹⁸ they have refreshed my spirit as well as yours. Give recognition to such people.

¹⁹ The churches of Asia send you greetings. Aquila and Prisca send warm greetings in the Lord to you together with the church that meets in their house. ²⁰ All the fellow believers send you greetings. Greet one another with a holy kiss.

²¹ I, Paul, write this greeting in my own hand. ²² If anyone has no love for the Lord, let him be cursed! O Lord, come! ²³ The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you. ²⁴ My love be with all of you in Christ Jesus. AMEN.

Review

This last part of Paul's letter feels like an anticlimax. Much of the chapter contains little more than personal information concerning Paul's travel plans (16:5-9), or instructions about Timothy (16:10-12), Stephanas and others (Stephanas probably delivered Paul's letter to Corinth - 16:15-20). Nevertheless, there are some worthwhile details to study here, in three places. First, in the opening four verses and what this says about Paul's collection of money for the relief of poverty in Jerusalem (16:1-4), second in the words of encouragement found in verses 13 and 14, and then the strange way Paul signs off in verses 21 to 24.

Everything must be read with the rest of this letter in mind. Paul began writing not just to the church at Corinth, but for the building up of the universal church (see notes: 1 Cor 1:1-8). The letter has contained the apostle's firm advice, which undoubtedly spoke directly into personal lives of Christians at Corinth and was potentially explosive. Paul's final words will therefore reflect his purpose in writing, and give us further insight into the extraordinary relationship between Paul and this church he founded.

The collection for the saints (16:1-4)

Verses 1 to 4 speak of something dear to Paul's heart, the state of the church in Jerusalem. If we first go back to Acts 11:27-28, we find there a prophecy given at Antioch, where Paul first ministered, by one named Agabus. He prophesied that there will be a great famine, and Acts records this took place '*during the reign of Claudius*'. Because of this and perhaps some persecution, the 'mother' church in Jerusalem was in difficulty. It may also be that its original call to godly living (Acts 2:42-47, 6:1-4) became unsustainable, we cannot know for sure, but the Jerusalem church eventually came into difficulty. In response, Paul organised a '*collection for the saints*' (16:1), and advertised this in more churches than just Corinth, at least those '*in Galatia*', a large region of what is now central Turkey where Paul had founded other churches.

His advice for such missionary giving is a good model for general Christian giving. He says, '*on the first day of every week, each of you must put aside whatever has been saved if things have gone well ...*' (16:2). The principle here is not tithe; Paul asks the Christians at Corinth to give regularly. They are to take from their resources or income any sum additional to personal needs, and set this aside in advance, before temptation can erode good practice! It is an powerful, perhaps revolutionary principle; each must decide what is needed

for normal living, on the assumption that a bountiful God will always provided for more than needs, and the rest must be given back to Him for His work.

Travel plans (16:5-9)

In verses 5 to 9, Paul meditates on his travel plans. he was in Ephesus, facing across the sea to Greece, and to Corinth. His travel options were either to go by sea, or travel north by land, then west across Macedonia and down to Corinth, taking him past Philippi, Thessalonica and Athens. On this last missionary journey (see Acts 19 and 20), Paul was strongly led to retrace his steps and so gather a gift for Jerusalem at each church.

In the end, Paul delayed for two years in Ephesus, and his missionary work extended inland to places such as Colossae and Laodicea (see Col. 1:7, 4:13 and the link with Epaphras). This was his, '*large and productive doorway*' for the ministry of the Gospel (16:9).

Timothy and Apollos (16:10-12)

Timothy was Paul's regular companion and was with him when the church at Corinth was founded (Acts 18:5). Typically of his dealings with timothy, Paul was very defensive about him, urging acceptance of his ministry. It must have been hard for anyone to shoulder the ministry of Paul! Paul also seems to have had no difficulty in asking Apollos, a potentially rival evangelist (1 Cor 3:4f. Acts 18:24) to go to Corinth before him. Certainly, Paul does not have any difficulty with him despite the divisions at Corinth (1 Cor 1:12), even though it seems that Apollos had not done as he had been requested!

Words of advice (16:13,14)

Verses 14 and 15 are worth memorising because they are a wonderfully succinct summary of Christian life and behaviour. Paul suggests four things; watchfulness, presumably for the second coming of our Lord, persistence in faith, bravery and fortitude, and the moral absolute of love. All this could be used as a sermon outline for Christian living, complete with references to the teachings of Jesus. They should not be missed, hidden here in the last chapter of this letter!

Stephanas and other friends (16:15-20)

In these verses, Paul gives thanks for the arrival of Stephanas and his friends. They had come to Ephesus with news of the church at Corinth, as some of the '*the first converts in Achaia*' (16:15), the region of Greece of which Corinth was the capital. Typically, Paul wanted to give faithful servants of the Gospel his approval and encouragement. From where he was staying in Ephesus, he also sent the greetings of Aquila and Prisca, the husband and wife leadership team he first came across in Corinth (Acts 18:2). These two travelled with Paul when he first left Corinth at the close of his second missionary journey, and eventually went ahead of him to Rome where they set up a house church before Paul arrived there (Romans 16:3)! How remarkable to read of these early pioneers of faith.

Final greetings (16:21-24)

At the end, Paul famously says '*I, Paul, write this with my own hand ...*' (16:21), a phrase that has led to endless speculation about his writing methods. Was the rest of the letter was written by dictation? Then, together with the comment '*see what large letters I write*' found in Galatians (6:11), some reckon that Paul was either blind or unable to write because of deformation. The theories are endless!

Perhaps the more remarkable words here are Paul's brisk command, '*if anyone has no love for the Lord, let him be accursed! O Lord, come!*' (16:22). We read swiftly over such phrases preferring to read about '*the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ*' (16:23) which comes next; but it is the first phrase that stands out. I reckon that after delivering this rather difficult letter, Paul was expressing here his absolute and uncompromising faith in Christ alone. In effect, he says that if people cannot live with Jesus' command to love (and we have ringing in our ears his famous essay on 'love' - ch13), then what part do they have in Christian fellowship? Those who will not obey Christ can hardly complain.

So it is that Paul concludes with the only thing he can say at the very end of a letter which despite all, urges God's people to love unconditionally, like Jesus; '*my love be with all of you in Christ Jesus. AMEN*' (16:24).

Discipleship

Application

Giving

There is not often much debate about Christian giving in churches today. Some require members to tithe and ask little more. But the first principle of Christian giving is everything we have is already God's, and so we must give everything to Him, so he will direct our needs and wants. Yet this is a tough line to follow. It is so much simpler to say 'give a tenth' and forget the rest or leave it to personal conscience.

The alternative is found here in this passage, where we are called to put aside in advance from anything we receive, the excess to our needs. It is surely worth exploring.

Christian principles

We can hardly say anything less than that the first letter to the Corinthians recommends the principle of love as the basic ethical principle of Christian living. It is essential to the practice of faith and all Christian service, and it is the only way the Christian can claim to act like the Saviour. Paul's entire letter has struggled with complex issues of Christian living and yet always returned to this, as it does at the end. Verse 14 seems to stand out, '*let everything you do be done in love*'; but note the words Paul uses when he curses those who oppose him. He says, '*if anyone has no love for the Lord ...*'; so the measuring stick for all Christian behaviour and church practice must be love. There can be no options on this practical expression of faith.

Ideas for what to do

- *Do they reflect God's call on your life? Reflect on this, and act accordingly.*
- *Write down the four merits in verses 13 and 14. To what extent does your life measure up to these, and what should you do about this?*

Questions (for use in groups)

1. *What are the highlights of this chapter?*
2. *What do we learn from Paul's comments about his journey and about people?*
3. *Which verses stand out for you with a Gospel message?*

Final Prayer

Keep me safe, Lord Jesus, in Your arms of love. Give me a heart that always seeks the best in people and works for the good of all. So may I be Your servant, and one who You can count on. AMEN