

Helping the Poor and Final Exhortations (1 Corinthians 16:1-23)

Expository Lessons from Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians

I. Introduction

- a. This is the last chapter in the letter. It includes closing instructions and salutations, and it mentions several people we are familiar with from **Acts** and Paul's other letters.
- b. It gives us an appreciation for the importance of Paul's personal relationships and his concerns for other Christians.

II. Paul in Ephesus but Plans to Visit Corinth Soon

- a. Read **1 Corinthians 16:1-12**.
- b. Paul's plans:
 - i. He is in Ephesus (Southwest Turkey) and plans to stay there a little longer, until after Pentecost.
 1. He says, "a great and effective door has opened to me, and there are many adversaries".
 - ii. He plans to cross over to Macedonia and then travel from there to Corinth in Achaia.
- c. Timeline for this letter.
 - i. We know Paul was in Ephesus when writing this.
 - ii. We know Apollos had already visited Corinth as a Christian (**1 Corinthians 1:12**). In fact, Paul has encouraged him to go back there again, but for some reason Apollos is not willing to go there yet.
 1. "Now I say this, that each of you says, 'I am of Paul,' or 'I am of Apollos,' or 'I am of Cephas,' or 'I am of Christ.'" (**1 Corinthians 1:12**, NKJV)
 2. Recall that Priscilla and Aquilla had encountered Apollos first in Ephesus, where they "explained to him the way of God more accurately" (**Acts 19:26**). After that, Apollos crossed over to Achaia and went down to Corinth (**Acts 18:27-9:1**).
 3. Paul came to Ephesus (**Acts 19:1**) on his third missionary journey and taught there for two years (**Acts 19:8-10**).

4. Paul departed Ephesus bound for Macedonia, and then went down to Greece for three months, in **Acts 20:1-3**.
 5. Therefore, it seems that Paul was writing this letter to the Corinthians from Ephesus, during the later part of his two-year stay in Ephesus in **Acts 19**.
 - a. From **Acts 20:1-3** we know Paul did carry out his plan, described in **1 Corinthians 16:5**, to go to Corinth.
 6. Paul mentions that Timothy might be visiting them in Corinth before Paul does, and asks that they treat him well and send him along since Paul and others are waiting for him.
 - a. Note that while Paul was still in Ephesus, he had sent Timothy and Erastus into Macedonia, ahead of him (**Acts 19:22**).
- d. The gift for the saints in Jerusalem.
- i. Re-read **1 Corinthians 16:1-4**.
 - ii. The saints in Jerusalem apparently were in need of financial assistance.
 1. Paul asked the Christians in Corinth to take up a collection for them, which would be handed over when Paul arrived in Corinth. He asked that they take up a collection on the first day of each week, each “as he may prosper”, so that it would be amassed and built up week by week.
 2. Paul had previously given similar instructions to the churches in Galatia. (Note Paul’s recounting of his discussion with the apostles in Jerusalem, in **Galatians 2:10**.)
 3. Then they also would designate someone approved to take the collection to Jerusalem, possibly accompanied by Paul, “if it is fitting”.
 - iii. **Question:** Is this passage a basis for saying we need to have a weekly general collection in the church? What do you think?
 1. They are gathering money each week, earmarked for a single offering for the Christians in Jerusalem, to be presented to Paul when he arrives.
 - a. This is to meet a one-time need, to help poor Christians in another church.

2. There is nothing wrong with having a regular weekly contribution when the church gathers on Sundays, to meet various ongoing financial needs of the church (salaries for supported staff, missions and evangelism, facility-related expenses, benevolent needs within the church, helping poor Christians in other locations, etc.)
 - a. As Paul said, “Do not muzzle the ox while it is treading out the grain” (**1 Corinthians 9:9**, where Paul is quoting from **Deuteronomy 25:4**). It is a Biblically based practice for churches to financially support those serving full-time in the ministry. (Although the leaders in our own church are self-supported.)
 - b. Regardless, it seems to me that the collection Paul is advocating here in **1 Corinthians 16** is *quite different* from regular weekly church contributions that go to support the financial responsibilities of the church.
- e. Paul had a concern for the poor Christians, and he called others to have the same concern, and to make sacrifices to meet those needs. Even when it was used for those in faraway places, to meet the needs of Christians they would never meet in person, in this life.
 - i. Examples of passages that demonstrate the connection between helping the poor and righteousness.
 1. Note that throughout the Scriptures, God’s view of righteousness is shown to have *two* aspects:
 - a. There are all the “*thou shalt not...*” type commands, all the sins of the flesh we are called to avoid (including sexual immorality, drunkenness, lying, hatred, idolatry, violence, pride, etc.)
 - b. However, there are also positive things we are called to do, perhaps foremost among them helping the poor and those in need.
 2. Consider the example of Job, a man whom God described as “there is none like him on the earth, a blameless, true and God-fearing man...who abstains from every evil thing” (**Job 1:8**, OSB). In **Job 31** this good man defends his righteous way of life before the Lord. In that speech, he addresses:
 - a. Sexual immorality and lust,
 - b. Deceit,

- c. How he treated others, including his servants,
- d. How he treated his enemies (not rejoicing in their downfall),
- e. Idolatry, as well as
- f. Greed vs. generosity in helping the poor.
- g. Read **Job 31:16-25**, and **31:31-40**.
 - i. Specifically, Job explains how he:
 - 1. Supported the widow,
 - 2. Fed the orphan,
 - 3. Clothed the naked,
 - 4. Provided housing for the stranger,
 - 5. Was merciful toward those who owed him money, and
 - 6. Paid his obligations.

3. The kind of fasting God is looking for, from **Isaiah 58**.

- a. Read **Isaiah 58:6-11**.
- b. True *spiritual fasting that is pleasing to God* is not simply denying our flesh and avoiding food for a time. It also includes showing love and concern for the poor. Specifically, this includes:
 - i. Correcting wrongdoing and violent dealings,
 - ii. Cancelling debts of the oppressed,
 - iii. Cancelling unjust contracts,
 - iv. Sharing food with the hungry,
 - v. Bringing the homeless into your home,
 - vi. Clothing the naked, and
 - vii. Not neglecting your children.
- c. Someone who fasts in this way will immediately gain the favorable attention of the Lord!

4. Jesus said that the second greatest command in the Law of Moses is the famous command that we love our neighbors as ourselves.
 - a. **Leviticus 19:18**, "...you shall love your neighbor as yourself."
 - b. Jesus taught that all the commandments of God hang on the first two commandments: to love God with our whole heart and soul, and to love our neighbors as ourselves (**Matthew 22:34-40**).
 - c. Sharing our wealth with brothers and sisters in need is simply putting this great commandment into practice.
 - d. This is much more difficult than simply giving 10% of your wealth to charity or the church, and living it up on the remaining 90%! Instead, it is about using everything you have to demonstrate love to others, to love and treat them as you would like to be treated and loved.
- ii. Jesus on helping the poor.
 1. In Sermon on the Mount, He begins with the challenge that our righteousness must exceed that of the Pharisees. In **Matthew 6**, he addresses when you give to the poor, when you pray, and when you fast (all three assumed His followers would be doing).
 - a. Read **Matthew 6:1-4**.
 - b. Do it quietly, secretly.
 - c. If we do it that way, God will reward us.
 2. In His first parable, the Parable of the Sower, in the third soil we are warned about the dangers of riches to Christians. In my opinion, this is the greatest danger to the church in America. Jesus explained the third soil as follows:
 - a. "Now he who received seed among the thorns is he who hears the word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful." (**Matthew 13:22**, NKJV)
 - b. Three of the four soils believe. However, only the fourth soil bears lasting fruit. The seed sown in the second soil falls away under persecution. However the seed sown

on the third soil gets choked out by wealth and by the cares of this world, and never matures to bear fruit.

3. In one of his last major teachings, Jesus warns His disciples to be prepared for His return.
 - a. Read **Matthew 24:45-51**.
 - i. The master (Jesus) leaves his servant behind, with instruction to feed and take care of his fellow servants, “to give them their food in due season”. If they neglect this and instead abuse their fellow servants, the master will be angry at his return and will cast them out.
 - ii. The unwise servant who is left behind fails on two accounts. He does not take care of feeding his fellow servants, and he indulges in sins of the flesh (getting drunk).
 - b. Jesus then tells three stories, in **Matthew 25**, to bring home this point. All speak of His departure, followed by a delayed return, and accountability for what those left behind did while He was away. I believe all three parables are about the *judgment of the Christians*: the servants who were left behind awaiting their Lord’s return.
 - i. Read **Matthew 25:31-46**.
 - ii. We will be judged based on what we did while He was away.
 - iii. His perspective: whatever we did to the least of His brothers, we did to Him.
 - iv. This is about the judgment of the church, those who believe in Jesus and call Him ‘Lord’.
- iii. In my opinion, Satan has divided the Christian world into two large camps.
 1. In the first camp are those Christians and churches that focus on holiness, separation from the world, and avoiding sins of the flesh. However, there is often little or no emphasis on the teachings of righteousness pertaining to helping the poor.

2. In the second camp are those Christians and churches who focus on helping the poor and preaching a “social gospel”, but turn a blind eye toward Jesus’ teaching on the other aspects of righteousness, including teachings on sexual immorality, drunkenness, and other sins of the flesh.
 - a. Jesus calls us to the Lord’s standard of righteousness, which must include *both aspects*.
- iv. Paul had the same concern for helping the poor that Jesus had emphasized.
 1. Read **Galatians 2:9-10**.
 - a. “...and when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that had been given to me, they gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised. *They desired only that we should remember the poor, the very thing which I also was eager to do.*” (**Galatians 2:9-10**, NKJV)
 2. Read Paul’s closing remarks to Timothy, in **1 Timothy 6:6-10** and **6:17-19**.
 - a. We are called to *be content* with food and clothing; just the most basic needs of this life.
 - b. Paul told Timothy to command the rich to be generous and willing to share.
 - c. By doing that, they will lay up a good foundation for eternal life.
 3. Paul gives extended instructions regarding helping the poor in **2 Corinthians 8-9**.
 - a. He points to the example of other Christians who gave generously, even “beyond their ability”, and calls the Corinthians to imitate that excellent example. (**2 Corinthians 8:3-7**)
 - b. Paul points to the example of Jesus Himself.
 - i. “I speak not by commandment, but I am testing the sincerity of your love by the diligence of others. For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that *though He was rich, yet for your sakes*

He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich.” (2 Corinthians 8:8-9, NKJV)

- c. Paul calls them to *bring to completion* what they had decided to do. Don't get stalled out by merely having good intentions, lacking the follow-through. (**2 Corinthians 8:10-11**)
- d. He seeks an equality of sacrifice; not that one part is burdened while the other gets off easy!
 - i. “For I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened; but by an equality, that now at this time your abundance may supply their lack, that their abundance also may supply your lack—that there may be equality. As it is written, ‘He who gathered much had nothing left over, and he who gathered little had no lack.’” (**2 Corinthians 8:13-15, NKJV**)
- e. Sow generously to reap generously; give *cheerfully* and *not reluctantly nor under compulsion*. God loves a cheerful giver!
 - i. “But this I say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver.” (**2 Corinthians 9:6-7, NKJV**)
 - ii. This is not the so-called ‘property gospel’ (if you give you will be blessed materially in this world. Instead, we are promised *eternal blessings*, but not necessarily those seen in this life!
- f. Practical challenges for us, in giving to help the needs of the poor.
 - i. **Objection No. 1:** “I don’t see poor people around me.”
 - 1. We live in a rich country with a large social safety net. Some believe that in the U.S., the only people lacking food generally are those facing problems that go beyond simple poverty (for example drug addiction, alcoholism, mental illness, abuse, unwillingness to work, etc.).

2. **Response:** They were giving to the poor in Jerusalem, far away. What about Christians in other parts of the world, who have little or no social safety net (in Central America, South America, Africa, Haiti, etc.).
- ii. **Objection No. 2:** “I don’t know how to give money effectively to ensure it’s being used properly. Who can I trust to administer this with integrity?”
 1. **Response:** They entrusted the money given to Christians of notable character who would make sure it got into the right hands.
 - a. Get advice; ask others. Work with people you know and trust, who are well-connected at the ground level where the money will be used.
 - iii. **Objection No. 3:** “It is expensive to live here in Boston. I am struggling just to make ends meet and to provide a nice life for my family here.”
 1. **Response:** Are you showing that you love others as much as yourself and your family? Is that reflected in your lifestyle and your budget? How do you think you compare to the Macedonian Christians? Are you more like the sheep or the goats in **Matthew 25**?
 - a. What do you think Jesus would say to you upon His return? Are you following His example and instructions?
 - iv. **Challenges:** We have some among us who are wealthy, or who will become wealthy over time through career or inheritance or circumstances. Consider what Paul wrote in **1 Timothy 6** and the example of Job.
 1. Give generously, voluntarily and cheerfully.
 2. Consider *both aspects* of righteousness:
 - a. avoiding sins of the flesh, the “thou shalt nots”, *as well as*
 - b. giving cheerfully to the poor!
 3. You need to do something with this teaching. Make a decision and get started!

III. Paul's Final Greetings and Final Charge

- a. Read **1 Corinthians 16:13-23**.
- b. Despite all the problems in the church in Corinth that Paul needed to address in this letter (disunity, immorality, false doctrines, various problems at their meetings and even with the Lord's supper), *Paul closes with a joyful, loving spirit*.
 - i. **Lesson for Us:** In the midst of a very imperfect church, let us deal with the problems as they come up, firmly when necessary, but always maintaining a spirit of love and joy!
 - ii. Even though there were some bad people and serious sins in the church in Corinth, Paul was nevertheless refreshed in his spirit by those striving to follow the Lord. Paul did not lose sight of that.
- c. Paul sends along greetings from others, including Priscilla and Aquila and the church that meets in their house (another house church example).
- d. He mentions greeting one another with a "holy kiss".
- e. Paul gives the charge to be strong and courageous. Given the phrases Paul uses here, I believe this charge was especially directed toward the men.
 - i. "Watch, stand fast in the faith, be brave, be strong. Let all that you do be done with love." (**1 Corinthians 16:13-14**, NKJV)
 - ii. "Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, *act like men*, be strong. Let all that you do be done in love." (**1 Corinthians 16:13-14**, ESV)
 - iii. "Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, *quit you like men*, be strong. Let all your things be done with charity." (**1 Corinthians 16:13-14**, KJV 1900)
 1. The term "quit" has many meanings. The one most of us think of first is perhaps "to give up, to surrender".
 2. However, as used here in the old sense it means: "To carry through; to do or perform something to the end, so that nothing remains; to discharge or perform completely."
 - a. (Dictionary Source: Noah Webster's 1828 *American Dictionary of the English Language*; entry on 'quit', definition No. 3)
 3. We are to perform completely the responsibilities God has given to us as men!

- f. The word Paul uses here to be “like a man” is the same Greek word we find in the LXX applied to Joshua when he was exhorted to be strong and courageous in preparing to enter Canaan.
- i. Read **Deuteronomy 31:1-7**.
 1. Note that this term “be a man / be brave” is the same Greek word found in the LXX in **Deuteronomy 31:6, 7 and 23**, as well as in similar passages in **Joshua 1:6, 7, 9 and 18**.
 2. The Greek word found here is andrizomai / ἀνδρίζομαι (literally: to be manly, to be a man; to be valiant).
 3. We also can see from context that the opposite of this term is *to be fearful*, specifically *to be fearful of other men*.
 - a. Recall that Joshua had explored Canaan 40 years earlier, and had seen the towering men who lived there, and their walled cities. The Lord was calling him to be bold and courageous, to be faithful to the Lord and not fear men.
 - b. Now, here in **1 Corinthians 16:13**, Paul is calling all the Christian men in Corinth to the same high challenge issued long before to Joshua!
 - ii. Jesus likewise taught in **Matthew 10** that we are not to fear men (who can kill the body but do nothing more).
 1. “And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.” (**Matthew 10:28**, NKJV)
 2. We are called to *fear God*, and to *not fear people*!
 - a. As Peter said, “Honor all people. Love the brotherhood. *Fear God*. Honor the king.” (**1 Peter 2:17**, NKJV)
 - g. We live in an era of gender confusion, where men are emasculated in society in general and even in churches.
 - i. The impact of our culture on men strikes me similar to what we see in biology where frogs are exposed to wastewater discharges containing endocrine disruptors (such as from birth control medications or certain herbicides).
 1. The end result: the male frogs become effeminized and pick up behaviors that are more typical of females of their species.

2. <https://www.nature.com/articles/srep23825>
- ii. There is much confusion in our society regarding what it means to “be a man” today.
 1. The old cultural stereotypes are not very helpful, either.
 2. What does it mean to “act like a man”, to most people? Watch football, drink beer, play cards, lift weights?
 3. Worldly stereotypes abound, but we need to look to Scriptural teaching and examples to grasp what it means to “be a man” in the eyes of the One who created men and women!
- iii. The schools, the government, the corporate world and sometimes even the churches are emasculating men today. Similar to what is happening to the unfortunate frogs in nature.
- iv. The call for Christian men today is to be like Joshua entering the Promised Land. If God is with us, we can be strong and courageous, and not give way to fear. We need only to fear God, and not be afraid of men.
- h. Most men today struggle with this. Signs of a church with a problem in this area might include:
 - i. Men not taking spiritual responsibility in the home, for discipling wife and training children.
 - ii. Men gossiping and slandering others they have problems with, instead of directly confronting perceived sin in others.
 - iii. Lack of evangelism.
- i. As we hold up the kingdom teaching on nonresistance and submission to authority, let us not overreact and misunderstand these teachings. God is not looking for churches filled with passive men who never speak up.
 - i. Paul repeatedly reminded us that we are in a spiritual battle and are called to be warriors who are equipped to stand against Satan and the forces of evil. However, we do not use the weapons of this world. We need to use the sword of the spirit as our offensive weapon.
(Ephesians 6:10-20)
 - ii. Read **Ephesians 6:10-20**.
 - iii. “You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those

who get drunk are drunk at night. But let us who are of the day be sober, *putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation*. For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him. Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing.” (1 **Thessalonians 5:5–11**, NKJV)

- iv. Let us find strength and encouragement of the many examples of real spiritual men of God who showed courage, throughout the Scriptures.
 - 1. Gather a crowd of heroes of faith, those who showed courage, such as the many heroes of faith who went before us, as discussed in **Hebrews 11**.
 - 2. Women can learn from this as well, following similar courageous examples from among women in Scripture.
- j. Most Christian men I know need to grow in courage and boldness. However, some men have the opposite problem (being bold yet lacking discretion wisdom, self-control and love). For those with that tendency, please focus on what it says in the verse that *follows* **1 Corinthians 16:13**.
 - i. “Let all that you do be done with love.” (1 **Corinthians 16:14**, NKJV)
 - ii. Otherwise, lacking love, you will be like the “sounding brass (gong) or clanging cymbal” Paul spoke of in **1 Corinthians 13:1**.
 - iii. Also, we need to be wise and considerate. For some of us, it is relatively easy to be hot-headed and confrontational.
 - 1. However, our boldness must be combined with wisdom and a self-controlled tongue.
 - iv. **Challenge:** Don’t just trust yourself. Ask others who know you and who will tell you the truth well (for married brothers, this would include your wife), which camp they think *you* are in.
 - 1. Ask them whether they see you as someone who needs to grow in courage and boldness, or
 - 2. If you are someone who is already bold, but who needs to grow in wisdom, discretion, self-control and *especially love*.
- k. **Closing Charge:** “Watch, stand fast in the faith, be brave, be strong (or ‘*be the man*’ / ‘*quit you like men*’). Let all that you do be done with love.” (1 **Corinthians 16:13–14**)