

# “Stand Strong”

- 1 Corinthians 16

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1 Corinthians 16 *I Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given orders to the churches of Galatia, so you must do also: 2 On the first [day] of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come. 3 And when I come, whomever you approve by [your] letters I will send to bear your gift to Jerusalem. 4 But if it is fitting that I go also, they will go with me. 5 Now I will come to you when I pass through Macedonia (for I am passing through Macedonia). 6 And it may be that I will remain, or even spend the winter with you, that you may send me on my journey, wherever I go. 7 For I do not wish to see you now on the way; but I hope to stay a while with you, if the Lord permits. 8 But I will tarry in Ephesus until Pentecost. 9 For a great and effective door has opened to me, and [there are] many adversaries. 10 Now if Timothy comes, see that he may be with you without fear; for he does the work of the Lord, as I also [do]. 11 Therefore let no one despise him. But send him on his journey in peace, that he may come to me; for I am waiting for him with the brethren. 12 Now concerning [our] brother Apollos, I strongly urged him to come to you with the brethren, but he was quite unwilling to come at this time; however, he will come when he has a convenient time. 13 Watch, stand fast in the faith, be brave, be strong. 14 Let all [that] you [do] be done with love. 15 I urge you, brethren—you know the household of Stephanas, that it is the firstfruits of Achaia, and [that] they have devoted themselves to the ministry of the saints—16 that you also submit to such, and to everyone who works and labors with [us]. 17 I am glad about the coming of Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus, for what was lacking on your part they supplied. 18 For they refreshed my spirit and yours. Therefore acknowledge such men. 19 The churches of Asia greet you. Aquila and Priscilla greet you heartily in the Lord, with the church that is in their house. 20 All the brethren greet you. Greet one another with a holy kiss. 21 The salutation with my own hand—Paul’s. 22 If anyone does not love the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be accursed. O Lord, come! 23 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ [be] with you. 24 My love [be] with you all in Christ Jesus. Amen.*

Chapter 16 begins with the words “*Now concerning the collection for the saints...*” In light of the fact that this is the last chapter of a letter with great challenge and impact, these words seem rather anticlimactic. Yet it is with greatly apparent that the church in Corinth had, prior to Paul’s response, wrote to Paul to seek guidance on some personal and doctrinal issues. Thus, the beginning of *this* chapter is no different. At the root of all that Paul has addressed in this letter was the principles of unity, community, and love in the body of Christ and even beyond - in the greater Christian body. Thus the issue of financial support would naturally arise. Financial support of the work of God is crucial if advancement is to be made, let alone sheer *survival* of the local church. It is noted that Paul *did* wait until the end of the letter to address this issue. Not as a PS, but only in light of all that had been addressed over the past 15 chapters. For while finances are crucial to the overall mission, without passion and unity, having all the money in the world to throw at the mission will come to nothing. The hand of God is not hampered by finances...for He “*owns the cattle on a thousand hills.*” (Ps 50:10) However, in Mark 6 we have a different record saying because of the people’s “*unbelief,*” Jesus “*...could do no mighty work there, except that He laid His hands on a few sick people and healed them.*” (Mark 6:5-6) Cash on hand wasn’t the problem, *they were.*

This issue of tithing and the giving of financial offering to the local church has generated a lot of questions and confusion in the greater body of Christ. Out on the street, the old adage that the church is only after your money

still floats around like undying conspiracy theories. Area 51 aliens, bigfoot, the covid vaccine changes your DNA, and churches are a scam to get money from you. I know personally that it's hard to find a place to park my Porsche when I stop by the church to pick up my clubs before I head to the country club. Has there been *mishandling* of finances by some churches? Sure. That's one of the reasons we have a Covenant community here to see where our money is spent and why we practice a full transparency on such matters. The poor handling of church finances has at times caused disillusionment, even bitterness on the part of many believers. Thus clarity, openness, and great fiscal responsibility is critical on behalf of any ministry that receives financial support from its members and why everyone should always consider wisely what local church to be a part of. Are they paying the staff too much? What are their priorities? Comfort or ministry? Internal amenities or external outreach? Are they involved in missions? Or is all the money spent to make their church bigger and shinier?

**16:1-2** *Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given orders to the churches of Galatia, so you must do also: On the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come.*

Paul moves to give practical instruction in this matter. Our term "tithe" is based on the idea of giving ten percent of one's income to the Lord. Though it is essentially an Old Testament principle, it provides us with a good place to start. The New Testament teaches that we seek the Lord and our hearts as to what to give. The Old Testament book of Deuteronomy tells us, "*All must give as they are able, according to the blessings given to them by the LORD your God.*" (De 16:17)

That passage and the one before us here in 1 Corinthians, seems to serve as permission ...for many of us, *almost instruction*, to temper our giving to a rate that we appear to be "tipping" God for good service. And of course we tip less when we feel we did not receive the service that we deserved! My opinion, *for what it's worth*, is that if you don't significantly feel it, then maybe you should revisit the issue in your personal life. We think that since the New Testament doesn't spell out 10%, that such means we automatically give less. Seldom do we see that as encouragement to give *more*. I purposefully do not know what each of you give. But I am aware that some of you certainly give more than 10%. I know a lot of churches struggle to pay a pastor, but one can easily do the math...if people *were* giving 10%, that would mean it would only take 10 people...or 10 families, to pay a salary for a pastor.

We must not look at the New Testament position as license to abstain or somehow be relieved from the responsibility of financial support, any more than we can be relieved of our responsibility to serve within our local church. The truth is however, a lot of people are at a church for what they can *get* not what they can give or participate in. They are living the dream as consumers and customers, not *co-workers*. They *go* to a church, they are not *the* church. The verse in Deuteronomy may use the language "as they are able," but it also uses "all must give," and Paul says here, "I have given orders," not "I have given suggestions."

Giving in time, finances, and heart are elements of Christian maturity. It is participation in the corporate endeavor of the particular local church to which one belongs. Some never find this maturity, just as there will always be those who never grow up in *any* of the Christian graces. This is a partial explanation as to why many believers are limping along in a weak state (in all areas of life).

**Luke 6:38** *"If you give, you will receive. Your gift will return to you in full measure, pressed down, shaken together to make room for more, and running over. Whatever measure you use in giving—large or small—it will be used to measure what is given back to you."*

Paul also wanted there to be an element of discretion in their giving, just as there should be with us today. The left hand should not know what the right hand is doing (Matt 6:3).

**2Co 9:7** *“You must each make up your own mind as to how much you should give. Don’t give reluctantly or in response to pressure. For God loves the person who gives cheerfully.”*

**16:3-4** *And when I come, whomever you approve by your letters I will send to bear your gift to Jerusalem. But if it is fitting that I go also, they will go with me.*

Paul lays out some important principles in the handling of church tithes and offerings. We note that such should not be entrusted to just one person. Also, those who handle those things should be chosen by the church, from within the church, not an outside entity. It is very important for a pastor/leader to remain accountable and answerable in the handling of church money, both as it’s coming in and as it’s going out. My call here is to have financial transparency and remain “above reproach” in this area.

**16:5-9** *Now I will come to you when I pass through Macedonia (for I am passing through Macedonia). And it may be that I will remain, or even spend the winter with you, that you may send me on my journey, wherever I go. For I do not wish to see you now on the way; but I hope to stay a while with you, if the Lord permits. But I will tarry in Ephesus until Pentecost. For a great and effective door has opened to me, and there are many adversaries.*

Paul understood what he was up against. Whenever a great and effective door is opened to us, we too can be assured that there will always be adversaries which rise to the occasion. Nothing has changed since Paul was on the frontlines! The greater the open door, the greater the attacks of the enemy. Thus any church that moves strongly into the fields that are ripe for harvest is going to call a lot of negative attention upon itself.

Paul was making some personal travel plans, but he added one critical stipulation: *if the Lord permits*. For Paul, this statement was more than just “Christianese”, more than a super-spiritual colloquialism. Paul was not basing his statement on theory, or just saying something his Christian brothers expected to hear. Paul had walked and ministered for the Lord long enough...he had been on enough missions trips, to know that things do not always go as planned! He saw the hand of God manifested enough in his presence that he had, no doubt, long ago given up **his** specific plans and given the “wheel” to the Master.

**Proverbs 3:5-6** *“Trust in the LORD with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding. Seek his will in all you do, and he will direct your paths.”*

Paul was not aloof or removed from the people he was ministering to. He was *one of them* and evidently considered them his friends and family. We read here that he hoped to spend the winter with them in Corinth. Things did not work out the way he planned, but he did eventually make it there.

Paul knew that inevitably, the enemies of God and adversaries to his work would appear from the outside and from within. Just like now, this fact is not *if* but rather only *when*.

**Acts 20:29-31** *“For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears.”*

**16:10-12** *Now if Timothy comes, see that he may be with you without fear; for he does the work of the Lord, as I also do. Therefore let no one despise him. But send him on his journey in peace, that he may come to me; for I am waiting for him with the brethren. Now concerning our brother Apollos, I strongly urged him to come to you with the brethren, but he was quite unwilling to come at this time; however, he will come when he has a convenient time.*

Though Paul didn't promptly make it to Corinth, apparently his assistant Timothy did. Paul lays out the way for him and wants to make sure the church in Corinth didn't rough him up. Paul knew the Corinthian church was aggressive. He was asking that they give Timothy the same respect they would give him.

Paul also mentions the evangelist Apollos. He was unable, or as Paul puts it so succinctly, *unwilling* to come to them. No further elaboration was offered.

Paul wanted to make sure that even if the atmosphere was one of war, the actions of the believers there were always backed by love. This is critical to us even today. However, to grasp this, one must first clearly have a handle on what **God's** love is, and not to try to replace it with earthly, emotion-based, one-sided, fickle and fluid love. **God's** love is always faithful, honest, and other-centered, *even when it is hard and perhaps not what we want to hear or experience*. His love is always gentle in its delivery, and consistent in its manifestation. It is pure in form, never changing, and always parental in nature.

### **16:13 Watch, stand fast in the faith, be brave, be strong.**

Paul now begins to deliver his final remarks; *words that clearly take on a serious tone*. The impact of these words roll over us in a magnitude of ways. For one, it directly rebuts the "Jesus does it all" segment of the greater church today. Such folks put everything on Christ...even their failure to exert some love motivated action and discipline! They don't have to try, to work, to serve, to exert effort or to sacrifice in anyway, and they cry "legalism" at any suggestion otherwise. But the problem with this new "designer" christianity is that it is overtly contrary to scripture. This verse...*and many other like it*, exude the responsibility and participatory effort that is a part of our faith. Oh yes, the Holy Spirit dwelling in us makes all that possible and makes it a successful reality. But there is no denying that *we play a great part* in our living out of the faith!

If you have been with us throughout the study of this letter, it is clear that the Corinthian believers were facing some heavy issues, both from within and out. It was not a time to get lazy or let down their guard. But Christian...*when is it?* For most often we fall when things seem calm and stable for the very reason that we *do* let down our guard and grow lazy in our comfort. Paul begins with clear warnings: **watch, ...stand fast, ...be brave, ...be strong.**

Clearly, Paul sees danger in their midst and yet still wants them to not only maintain, not only "hang on," but to actually **thrive**. He urges them to not give up an inch to the enemy and even to those who clandestinely serve Satan's purposes, some no doubt without even knowing it. The exhortation to "be brave" is also translated "be a man." Paul was calling us not just to bravery, but to maturity and a staunch heart. "Be a Man?" Hmm... what a righteous call in our day that is!

Paul speaks in almost military terms here. He once warned his assistant Timothy to "wage the good warfare."

**In 1Pet 5:8-9 he called us to** *"Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brother-hood in the world."*

Paul knew, as we must, *that we are at war.*

**Mt 13:39** *"...the enemy that sowed them (bad seed) is the devil; the harvest is the end of the world;"*

What we face is not a game, nor is the outcome inconsequential. Our enemy is a roaring lion...*seeking whom he may devour*. If we forget that, he will put us out of the war, and out of our purpose in the kingdom.

**16:14** *Let all that you do be done with love.*

Again...so much of what we call love today is a long way from God's version. We must learn His love and wrap all we do in that love.

**16:15-16** *I urge you, brethren—you know the household of Stephanas, that it is the firstfruits of Achaia, and that they have devoted themselves to the ministry of the saints—that you also submit to such, and to everyone who works and labors with us.*

Stephanas and his family were apparently one of the founding families in the church and had committed themselves to the ministry there. In doing so, they grew to a leadership role in the church, and Paul was asking the people to submit to their authority.

Many religious groups have through the ages attempted a communal type of church government where everyone shares equally in the leadership and takes equal part in teaching and ministering. We would be hard-pressed to find any such principle within scripture. This is common in the home church movement that more often than not lack all the biblical presence and qualifications of a pastor, minister, deacon, elder, etc. We even read the Word warning all of us, “*Let not many of you become teachers...*” James 3:1

People tend to bristle at this word that Paul used; **submit**. We tend to not easily give up our perceived self-determination and personal power. It's what originally kept us from Christ, and keeps us from surrendering the control of our lives to God after salvation. Submit to your leaders and at the same time hold them accountable to their submission to God and scripture. Submit, *but with eyes wide open*.

**16:17-18** *I am glad about the coming of Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus, for what was lacking on your part they supplied. For they refreshed my spirit and yours. Therefore acknowledge such men.*

Stephanas was apparently doing what pastors were supposed to be doing, supplying what the others lacked. That's my job in a nutshell. Stephanas and the others refreshed the spirits of the flock. “Therefore, acknowledge such men.” Paul was confirming both the position these men held and the support the people were to give them.

**16:19-21** *The churches of Asia greet you. Aquila and Priscilla greet you heartily in the Lord, with the church that is in their house. All the brethren greet you. Greet one another with a holy kiss. The salutation with my own hand—Paul's.*

Finally Paul sends his personal greetings to these believers, along with a “hello” from other churches and believers who were unified with them in spirit. Even Priscilla and Aquila of Acts are mentioned. NOTE: It seems that Paul's usual practice was to dictate his letters to an aid and then sign them himself.

**16:22-24** *If anyone does not love the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be accursed. O Lord, come! The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. My love be with you all in Christ Jesus. Amen.*

Paul, adding a last remark, reminds them of the simplicity of God's salvation and the vast chasm that separates us from the lost. “Oh Lord, come!” or “Maranatha!” was a term used by early Christians. They were ready and waiting. **Are we?**