

AF A9 BIBLE STUDY: I Corinthians 16

Scripture of Lesson: I Corinthians 16: 1-24

1. Collection for relief fund: v. 1-4

In verses 1-2 Paul instructs the Corinthian church to take up collections for the brethren of Judea before his coming when they meet on each Sunday so as not to make it a one-time burden. This collection was to form a relief fund for the brethren because of a famine that struck the area during the second to fourth years of the reign of Claudius Caesar as recorded by Josephus and also in Acts 11.

And in these days prophets came from Jerusalem to Antioch. Then one of them, named Agabus, stood up and showed by the Spirit that there was going to be a great famine throughout all the world, which also happened in the days of Claudius Caesar. Then the disciples, each according to his ability, determined to send relief to the brethren dwelling in Judea. This they also did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul. [Acts 11: 27-30]

This famine, which came before the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 as well as many more to come, had been prophesied by Jesus and it occurred as a historical fact:

For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of sorrows. [Matt 24:7]

God sent Jesus as the bread of life as He claimed, "And Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst. [John 6:35]" Yet, the Jews rejected Jesus and God sent this famine as one of the punishments prior to the total destruction of Jerusalem. The famine, however, hit the Christians as well as non-believers. Therefore, the churches in other regions sent relief funds as recorded in Acts 11:30 above. This relief effort must have been church-wide campaign led by both Paul and Barnabas.

This tradition of Christian charity, started with the relief of Jewish Christians in Judea by Gentile churches, has continued to this day and has expanded to the relief of both Christians, non-believers and people of other faiths. Recent relief programs for the refugees from Middle East and Africa are manifestations of the Christian charity as evidence of their "love of neighbors." However, God's instruction to consider and help the poor has always been emphasized throughout the history as we read in OT and clearly see in the examples of Jesus' ministry for the poor:

Blessed is he who considers the poor; The Lord will deliver him in time of trouble. [Psalm 41:1]

He who has a generous eye will be blessed, for he gives of his bread to the poor. [Proverbs 22:9]

2. Missional travel plans: v. 5-12

Based on verses 8 and 24, we can surmise that Paul wrote this epistle while he was in Asia, such as in Ephesus, where he was intending to stay until Pentecost of the year, and sent the letter in the hands of three men of Corinth, who came later to Philippi to which Paul traveled after his time of sojourn in Ephesus. Paul saw there was a good potential for the gospel work in Ephesus as well as the need for bolstering the faith of the church in this area due to the presence of many adversaries. He did not want to leave Ephesus when there was so much work there in this city yet.

At the same time his heart yearned to go to Corinth to minister unto their spiritual needs. To meet this urgent need of the Corinthian church Paul was sending his young companion, Timothy. Paul had asked earnestly Apollos to go to Corinth, but he did not want to go for some reason [v. 12]. From this we can see that, whereas some of the Corinthian believers had made factions with some siding with Apollos, Paul did not

let any feeling of jealousy or competition come in between him and Apollos. *“He planted [seeds of the gospel], Apollos watered; but God gave the increase [3:6].”* This is a lesson to all servants of God; they need not compete one another and must not let jealousy towards a fellow servant mar the relationship.

On the other hand, Paul was concerned about how Timothy would be accepted by the Corinthian church. So he commanded the church to *“not despise him but conduct him forth in peace that he may come unto me; for I look for him with the brethren [v. 11].”*

Paul’s concern for Timothy’s acceptance in churches was expressed in his letter to Timothy:

Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity [I Timothy 4:12].

When a young pastor ministers a church, this is often one of the challenges that he faces-- possible low esteem of the qualification based on young age. Christians should endeavor to be a help and encouragement to such a young pastor instead of despising him on account of his age. Consider the case of Rev. Charles Spurgeon, who started his ministry when he was only 19 years old.

3. Final words of advice and greetings: v. 13-24

Paul encourages the Corinthian Christians to *“watch, stand fast in the faith, and ‘quit you’ like men, be strong. Let all things be done in charity [v. 13-14].”* There were enough temptations to fall back to their past sinful life of depravity and idol worship. There were elements of false doctrines also. In the face of such spiritual threats, Paul was encouraging these Christians to stand firm on their faith without wavering, and to do all things in charity as he wrote in Chapter 13. We need the same exhortation today in the face of many temptations and ungodly influences around us. There is so much to aspire to possess in eternity and the worthwhileness of striving on in our endeavors to walk after Christ.

Paul commends the family of Stephanas, who accepted the gospel as one of the first fruits in Achaia, where Corinth is located. This noble family was dedicated to the care of the fellow believers [v. 15]. Three men --Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus--came to Paul in Philippi to report on the status of the church. Hearing their report, Paul’s heart was ‘refreshed,’ meaning ‘relieved and set at peace.’ So the last part of this epistle was written while Paul was at Philippi, which is some distance north of Corinth. And he sent the letter, most of which had been written while in Asia, in the trust of these three men, who were representatives of the church. We admire good, wholesome Christians like these three men, who are dedicated to the care of church and in the support of God’s ministry.

Finally, Paul finishes his letter by sending his personal love to the Corinthian church [v. 24]. Today we live in a world where the communication media are excellently available to all peoples. Christians share news and fellowship with one another using Internet and social media, exchanging messages of care, love and support--particularly to those in need. Engaging in such activities is a part of God’s blessing made available to His people.

Discussion topics:

- 1. What is my attitude towards the poor and the Church’s responsibility towards them?*
- 2. How supportive have we been to God’s ministry and how can we do better?*
- 3. What have we learned from our study of I Corinthians?*