DO EVERYTHING IN LOVE

1 Corinthians 16:1-24

Key Verses: 16:13-14

“Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be men of courage; be strong. Do everything in love.”

This is the epilogue of 1 Corinthians. The Apostle Paul gives some practical instructions about offering (1-4). He also shares his own travel plans, as well as instructions regarding coworkers and Corinthian leaders (5-18). Finally, he gives affectionate and spicy greetings (19-24). Undergirding all of his practical instructions, Paul stresses the basic attitude that comes from faith in Christ: Do everything in love. In this passage we learn how to practice some basic principles in the love of God.

I.  Prepare your gift for God’s people (1-4)

Look at verse 1. “Now about the collection for God’s people: Do what I told the Galatian churches to do.” At that time, Paul was organizing a special relief offering from all the Gentile churches to the Jerusalem Church. The Jerusalem Church had been the birthplace of Christianity. From Jerusalem, the gospel had spread to Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth (Ac 1:8). Gradually, however, the center for world mission work shifted from Jerusalem to Antioch (Ac 11:19ff., 13:1ff.), the home base for Paul’s ministry to Galatia, Macedonia and Achaia. In the meantime, the Jerusalem Church had fallen on hard times. Perhaps because of persecution (Ac 8:1), or widespread famine (Ac 11:28), the Jerusalem Church had become poor. Paul wanted the Gentile churches to send a relief offering to them. In fact, Paul said that the Gentile churches “owe it to them. For if the Gentiles have shared in the Jews’ spiritual blessings, they owe it to the Jews to share with them their material blessings” (Ro 15:26,27). From the time that Abraham offered a tenth to Melchezidek (Ge 14:20), it has been a principle for those who receive spiritual blessing to express their gratitude by giving material offerings. When the Gentile churches did this, it would lead toward the unification of Jewish and Gentile Christians under one head, Jesus Christ.

When the Corinthians had first heard about this offering, they were eager to participate (2 Cor 8:10). But they did not know how to do it. So Paul shared with them instructions that he was giving to other churches as well. In verses 2-4 we find some principles of Christian offering.

First, “On the first day of every week.” Look at verse 2. “On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made.” When we worship God on the Lord’s day we should make a proper offering to God. Even if we are designating this as a relief offering to some needy people, we must offer it first to God. Why should we offer to God? This is God’s world (Ge 1:1; Ps 51:12). As stewards, we should offer the fruits of our labor to God in recognition of his ownership. When we honor God first with our materials, we can keep spiritual order: God first, man second, and material things third. According to the prophet Malachi, one-tenth of our income belongs to God (Mal 3:8). We are not doing a favor to God by giving one-tenth, we are simply giving God what we owe him as stewards of his beautiful world. When we honor God, God promises to open the floodgates of heaven and pour his blessing upon us (Mal 3:10).

Second, “each one of you.” There were many kinds of people in the church at Corinth: old and young, rich and poor, Jew and Gentile. They had different backgrounds and were at different stages of life. Yet “each one” of them should give an offering to God. The first generation of Chicago UBF leaders  sacrificially offered to God. Chicago UBF is financially healthy and is in good standing with the ECFA. However, like many other churches in the United States, we are experiencing that the younger generation is not offering so sacrificially. Some think that since their parents offered for many years, this relieves them of offering. So they do not prepare. However, “each one” of us should offer to God sacrificially.

Third, “in keeping with his income.” To some rich people, offering a tithe is painless. To some poor people, offering $25 can be a challenge. We should not compare with others in the matter of offering. We must consider how the Lord has blessed us and offer to God. Jesus was most moved by a poor widow who put two small copper coins into an offering box (Mk 12:43-44). Though it looked insignificant to others, Jesus knew that it was all she had to live on. It represented her heart and her faith in God. We should not waste time thinking about what we would offer if we had more. We must offer sacrificially from what we have now. When we offer from our hearts, by faith, in keeping with our income, it pleases God.

Fourth, “saving it up.” Some people do not prepare their offering in advance. When offering time comes, they suddenly dig into their pockets to see if they have something to give. Then they wave $1 in the air and place it in the basket. This is not a right attitude. We must prepare in advance by saving up from our earnings regularly. When we place our offering in the basket on Sunday, it is the final step in a prayerful process of giving to God. Giving materially to God must be part of our lifestyle.

Fifth, “send them with your gift.” Look at verses 3-4. “Then, when I arrive, I will give letters of introduction to the men you approve and send them with your gift to Jerusalem. If it seems advisable for me to go also, they will accompany me.” Paul did not want to merely send money to Jerusalem. Paul wanted to send representatives of the churches with the money. So he asked the Corinthians to choose proper people. This should be done with much prayer, for it is crucial to building healthy relationships with other Christian churches. The most important criteria is faithfulness (1 Cor 4:2). One who was chosen should be recognized by all for his sacrificial life, hardworking spirit, honesty, and trustworthiness. Paul would give letters of introduction to such people, putting his apostolic authority behind them. This required mutual trust and respect. Some people think that in helping fellow Christians, giving money is enough. However, it is not. Building relationships of mutual respect and love is more important. Material giving may have a short term effect. But love relationships last long afterward, into eternity.

The Greek word for “gift” in verse 3 is “charis.” This is the same root from which we get the word “grace.” Giving to God and giving to others should come from the deep realization of God’s grace upon us. God gave his one and only Son as a ransom sacrifice. Christ died on the cross to bear our sins. Christ has freely given us the forgiveness of sins, eternal life and the kingdom of God as our inheritance. This rich and eternal blessing has come to us free of charge because Jesus paid it all. Romans 3:24 says, “...and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.” When we remember this, we can give graciously to God and others.

II.  Paul’s plans, and requests regarding coworkers (5-18)

In verses 5-9, Paul shares his travel plan. At the present time, he was in Ephesus. However, Paul’s heart burned with love for the Corinthians. He wanted to visit them and deal decisively with those who were arrogant and a bad influence (4:19). He wanted to encourage others and build up the church again. He planned to go through Macedonia, perhaps visiting the Philippian believers. Then he would come to the Corinthains.

Paul was not superficial in discipleship. Though he had poured out his heart in his letters to the Corinthians, this was not enough. Paul wanted to spend time with them personally, giving liberally of himself to study the Bible with them, pray together, and share love fellowship (6a). Yet to Paul their relationship was not a one-way street. Paul sought mutual edification. Paul respected them as God’s servants. Paul wanted to involve them with his mission activities (6b). Still, Paul knew that ultimately the Lord was in charge of their relationship, and of all things (7).

Paul decided to stay on at Ephesus for a while because the Lord had opened a great door for effective work. Acts 19 records this. Through daily Bible study with dedicated disciples in the lecture hall of Tyrannus, the word of God spread all over the province of Asia (Ac 19:9). God was doing extraordinary miracles. The name of Jesus was greatly honored. Many who practiced sorcery burned their scrolls publicly to show their repentance. What we call Turkey today, where M. Vladimir Point Levitsky serves God, virtually became a Christian nation through Paul’s gospel ministry. It was a great work of God that opened Paul’s eyes to world mission in Rome. At the same time, some people began to oppose Paul because they were losing money on their idol-making business. Though there was imminent danger, and the need of the Corinthian church was pressing, Paul decided to stay at Ephesus. Paul followed the work of the Holy Spirit. When God opened a door, Paul went through it even though it was costly to do so.

Still, Paul did what he could for the Corinthians. Paul decided to send Timothy to the Corinthians ahead of him. Timothy had learned Paul’s gospel faith and lifestyle. Paul sent Timothy to Corinth to model his gospel lifestyle as a good influence (4:17). However, Timothy was very different from Paul. While Paul was strong and charismatic, Timothy was gentle and meek. If the Corinthians saw Timothy from a human point of view, they could despise him. Then Timothy’s ministry ineffective. Paul did his best to protect Timothy and to make his ministry to the Corinthians fruitful. Paul appealed to them to respect Timothy as a servant of God, as they had respected Paul. Paul said, “...for he is carrying on the work of the Lord, just as I am.” Though servants of Christ may be quite different in character, spiritual maturity and age, if they are carrying on the work of the Lord, we should respect them. Then we can learn from them and receive the blessing that God wants to give.

Paul wanted to send Apollos to Corinth as well. Even though there had been a sharp division after Apollos’ first stint in Corinth (1:12), Paul did not hesitate to send Apollos back. Paul valued Apollos as a coworker and called him “our brother.” Paul wanted to work together with Apollos. Apollos was not willing to go at that time, but he would go when he had the opportunity.

The real enemy of the Corinthians was the devil, who had exploited their spiritual immaturity to divde and damage them. Paul tells them the way of victory. Look at verses 13-14. “Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be men of courage; be strong. Do everything in love.” The devil is like a shifting shadow or a paper tiger. He seems very strong in the darkness, but when the light of truth shines upon him, he flees. When Paul said, “Be on your guard,” it meant to be spiritually alert and prayerful. When we depend on God in prayer, God gives us victory over the power of the devil.

Paul said, “stand firm in the faith.” Paul has shared the gospel with the Corinthians: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that Christ rose from the dead on the third day according to the Scriptures. Christ’s death and resurrection save us from all the consequences of sin and give us living hope in the kingdom of God. Christ gives life to us while we live in this world and Christ will raise us from the dead in his own perfect likeness when he comes again. Christ restores the spiritual order of God’s creation and the perfect paradise where all of God’s children live with him in peace and love forever. When we stand firm in this faith, God gives us victory.

To be men of courage and to be strong means to resist the bad influence of the world by faith. Those who have no resurrection faith want to enjoy this world as though it is everything. They say, “Let us eat and drink for tomorrow we die.” The bad influence of hedonsim is working terribly in our nation as the trend toward recognizing homosexual union gets stronger. But God wants us to live with courageous faith that challenges the sinful trend of the world. We can do so by holding firm to resurrection faith.

Look at verse 14 again. “Do everything in love.” When we have strong faith in the gospel, we are sure of God’s love for us. God loves each of us so much that he gave his one and only Son as a ransom sacrifice for us. This love of God moves us to love God and to love others. When we love one another in everything we do, we form a strong Christian community that wins the victory over the power of darkness. In the midst of busy activity to prepare the Purdue Conference, it is good to stop and examine our hearts. We must do everything in love.

In verses 15-18, Paul mentions some of the Corinthian leaders. Paul held up the household of Stephanus because they had been the first converts in Achaia, and they had devoted themselves to the service of the saints. Paul said in verses 15b,16, “I urge you, brothers, to submit to such as these and to everyone who joins in the work, and labors at it.” Those who work hard to serve the body of Christ are noteworthy. They are acting out of the love of God in Christ. We should identify these people and work with them to serve the Lord. Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus visited Paul in Ephesis and shared prayer topics with him. They coworked with Paul in serving the Corinthian believers. As they shared Paul’s directives it helped the believers in Corinth to repent and to have seasons of refreshing from the Lord. Paul urges the Corinthians to recognize those who work hard in the Lord and those who respect God’s workers and God’s work.

III.  Final greetings (19-24)

Paul greeted the Corinthians, not only as their shepherd, but on behalf of all the churches in Asia. Specifically Paul mentioned Aquila and Priscilla. They had been Paul’s coworkers in Corinth. Tentmakers, as he was, they had traveled around the Roman Empire. Wherever they went they had a church that met in their house. It was a growing and joyful house church and they all greeted the Corinthians.

Look at verse 20. “All the brothers here send you greetings. Greet one another with a holy kiss.” Paul encouraged them to practice the affection of Christ with one another.

Paul wrote the greeting of the letter in his own hand. Look at verse 22. “If anyone does not love the Lord—a curse be on him. Come, O Lord.” This kind of expression may sound harsh to our ears. But what it really does is encourage the love of Christ in absolute terms. In fact, this is what was most needed in Corinth. When the Corinthians did everything in love, love for Christ and love for one another, all of their problems would dissolve and they would experience paradise on earth. Those who were causing trouble in the church were those who loved sin and the world more than Jesus.

Paul’s final words are beautiful. Look at verses 23-24. “The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you. My love to all of you in Christ Jesus. Amen.” Though Paul had said many things to them, some difficult to swallow, Paul ends by assuring them of the grace of Christ and his love for them. The grace of Jesus is greater than all our sin. The love of God unites us in the body of Christ even though we have many problems and weaknesses.

In this passage we have thought about some practical lessons on giving offerings and working together. May God help us to do these things with the love of Christ burning in our hearts. May God help us to do everything in love.