

12/28/25

A Heart for Christ's Church

1 Corinthians 16:1–24

Read: 1 Corinthians 16:1–24

Sermon Introduction

It is hard to believe that we have arrived at the final chapter and the final sermon in our study of 1 Corinthians. It has been such a blessing going through this letter. I have personally learned so much, and I trust the Lord has used this study to grow and encourage you as well.

Paul devoted all of 1 Corinthians 15 to the resurrection, showing not only the promise of future glory but also the transformative power it has on our lives today. In the closing verse of that chapter, he exhorts believers to “always abound in the work of the Lord,” reminding us that our labor for Christ is never in vain.

In chapter 16 we find several tangible examples of the work of the Lord. We find people engaged in the work of the Lord. We find people transformed by the gospel and the truth of the resurrection, and this has produced a love and heart for the church.

Main Point: In 1 Corinthians 16:1–24, we find three examples of a faithful commitment to the church that calls us to cultivate the same heart and care for the church.

Outline:

I. A Compassionate Heart for the Church (1–4)

II. A Sacrificial Ministry for the Church (5–12)

III. A Devoted Love for the Church (13–24)

As I spent time with this week's passage, I was especially encouraged to see many of the very marks Paul highlights, such as a love for Christ and love for His church, already evident within this church family. As we come to this final chapter, may it stir us up to keep fixing our eyes on Christ and to continue being conformed to His character, His desires, and His love for His church.

I. A Compassionate Heart for the Church (1–5)

Let's begin by looking at verse 1. Paul opens with the phrase, “**Now concerning.**” This phrase serves as a marker telling us that Paul is shifting his focus to address some practical concluding matters for the church.

He then mentions “**the collection for the saints.**” What is Paul referring to here? This was a coordinated collection among the churches Paul had planted to gather financial support for the believers in Jerusalem.

Jerusalem is where Christians experienced some of the worst persecution. For a Jew to convert and follow Christ typically meant that you were put out of the synagogue (John 9:22) and rejected by your family (Matthew 10:34–36) and outcasted from the community.

The believers there likely suffered hardship and reproach, had their property taken, and lost their ability to function in society. The **saints** in Jerusalem were experiencing severe poverty.

Paul knew that the appropriate response was for the broader church to come together to help alleviate their hardship. He understood that believers should have compassion for one another.

What is compassion? **“Compassion is the deep feeling of sharing in the suffering of another and the desire to relieve that suffering.” – Jerry Bridges**

This was the instruction he had already given to the churches in **Galatia**. These would have been the churches in the cities of Derbe, Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch (Acts 13:14–14:23). The Corinthians had heard about the collection and wanted to participate, that’s why Paul says **as I directed the churches of Galatia, so do you also**.

The immediate context of the instruction in these verses concerns this collection for the saints, they directly relate to compassion through financial giving. But there are four principles here that should govern our compassion for one another.

These principles can be applied broadly to how we how give financially to meet others’ needs, how we serve to meet others’ needs, how we minister to others, and how we care for one another within the body of Christ. This is part of our work in the Lord.

First, Paul teaches that compassion should be a **regular** work. He writes, **“On the first day of every week...”** In other words, the willingness to sacrifice our finances, our resources, our time, and our abilities to meet the needs of others should be regular part of the Christian life. Believers should be consistently characterized by compassionate sacrifice for one another in the church.

Second, compassion is a work for **every believer**. As it says **“each one”** is to participate. Compassion is not a ministry reserved for a certain group within the church. It is not limited to the wealthy, the particularly gifted, or the leadership of the church. Every believer is called to cultivate a compassionate heart for their brothers and sisters.

In this way, compassion through generosity, giving, and service is a beautiful ministry that unites the church. Every member is able to participate in meeting the needs of one another.

Third, our compassion should be exercised in accordance with our capacity. Notice he writes, **“each one of you is to put aside and save, as he may prosper.”** The ways in which we give

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ourselves (through service, generosity, time, and material resources) should reflect the means God has entrusted to us and take into account our responsibilities to home and family.

The Lord determines the resources and the circumstances of our lives. Some of us have more time, finances, or abilities, others of us have less. God does not call us to neglect our families or responsibilities in an effort to meet every need, but He does call us to love and care for one another as faithfully as we are able.

Lastly, our compassion toward one another must be eager and willing, never forced or reluctant. Paul explains that he gave these instructions **“so that no collections be made when I come.”**

This principle is even clearer in **2 Corinthians 9:5–7**, where Paul is commenting on the same matter in more detail. He writes, **“So I thought it necessary to urge the brethren that they would go on ahead to you and arrange beforehand your previously promised bountiful gift, so that the same would be ready as a bountiful gift and not affected by covetousness. ⁶ Now this I say, he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. ⁷ Each one *must do* just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.”**

He didn’t want their giving to be motivated by pressure or compelled from gathering the collection at the last moment. Our compassion should be from a willing heart and not done begrudgingly.

From these two passages, we see that God desires compassionate giving that is thoughtful, intentional, and cheerful. Whether expressed through finances, service, or care for one another, our compassion should be willing, purposeful, and joyful.

Finally, look at verses **3–4** **When I arrive, whomever you may approve, I will send them with letters to carry your gift to Jerusalem; 4 and if it is fitting for me to go also, they will go with me.”**

In these verses, Paul explains the method by which this collected gift would be delivered to Jerusalem. He indicates that the church would approve the individuals who would carry the gift, and that he himself would accompany them if it were appropriate to do so. This demonstrates Paul’s high degree of integrity and willingness to have accountability.

As an elder at Cornerstone, I have the privilege of witnessing firsthand the compassion that is evident here in this church. From our deacons faithfully stewarding the deacons’ fund to meet practical needs, to the prayers and meal trains that support those walking through hardship, to the loving and sacrificial care shared within our community groups, it is a beautiful and encouraging picture to witness.

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My family and I have also been direct recipients of the generous and compassionate giving of this church. (Family, elders, I) We are so grateful for you. Your love for one another, and for us, is evident, and it brings me great joy to know that not only do we see it, but the Lord Himself sees it as well.

Compassion ultimately requires sacrifice and that leads to our next point.

II. A Sacrificial Ministry for the Church (5–12)

In verses 5–12, Paul outlines the ministry plans for him, Timothy, and Apollos and in this section, we see five marks of a sacrificial heart of ministry for the church.

First, a sacrificial ministry for the church is marked by a commitment to time spent with the church. Let's look at verses 5–7 **But I will come to you after I go through Macedonia, for I am going through Macedonia; 6 and perhaps I will stay with you, or even spend the winter, so that you may send me on my way wherever I may go. 7 For I do not wish to see you now *just* in passing; for I hope to remain with you for some time, if the Lord permits.**

Paul plans to visit the Corinthians after passing **through Macedonia**. That region included the churches at Philippi (Acts 16:11–40), Thessalonica (Acts 17:1–9), and Berea (Acts 17:10–15). These were all churches Paul planted, invested in, and loved dearly. And he desires to see them and spend time with them as part of his travels.

Paul also expresses a desire to **stay with** the Corinthians, possibly to **spend the winter** with them. He doesn't just want to see them **in passing**, but he wants to **remain** with them, to share **some time** with them. The language here reflects a ministry that values life shared together.

His heart here is similar to what he wrote in **Romans 1:11–12** **“For I long to see you so that I may impart some spiritual gift to you, that you may be established; ¹² that is, that I may be encouraged together with you *while* among you, each of us by the other's faith, both yours and mine.”**

Ultimately, a sacrificial ministry reveals itself in the priority it gives to being present with the church.

Second, sacrificial ministry is willing to pursue opportunities to serve the church, even when doing so is difficult, inconvenient, or costly. In verses 8–9, Paul explains why he is not coming immediately: **8 “But I will remain in Ephesus until Pentecost; 9 for a wide door for effective service has opened to me, and there are many adversaries.”**

Paul does not consider ministry opportunities by how comfortable or easy they are. Rather, he seeks to be faithful with the opportunities God has puts before him. He is willing to endure hardship and inconvenience for the sake of the church and the advance of the gospel.

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This mindset is captured beautifully in **Colossians 1:24**. This is a passage that often comes to my mind, and I confess I wish I embraced more fully. There Paul writes: **“Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His body, which is the church...”**

Paul understood that he was given a grace gift in Christ as a stewardship from God, entrusted to him for the benefit of others in the church. He was willing to sacrifice time, energy, convenience, comfort, preference, all for the goal of serving and building up Christ’s people.

His ministry was marked by loving sacrifice. But it wasn’t only Paul who modeled a sacrificial ministry for the church. We see that same example in Timothy as well.

Third, sacrificial ministry for the church requires courage in the Lord. Look with me at verses **10–11 “Now if Timothy comes, see that he is with you without cause to be afraid, for he is doing the Lord’s work, as I also am. 11 So let no one despise him. But send him on his way in peace, so that he may come to me; for I expect him with the brethren.”**

Paul is concerned that Timothy might arrive in Corinth and experience fear. As this entire letter has made clear, ministry in Corinth was not easy. The church was marked by division, pride, doctrinal confusion, immaturity, and moral compromise. Serving there required courage to faithfully minister God’s Word.

Paul’s concern for Timothy likely extends beyond the challenges of ministry in Corinth. Scripture indicates that Timothy was prone to fear and needed encouragement. Paul exhorts him to fan into flame the gift God had given him, reminding him that God has not given a spirit of timidity but of power (2 Timothy 1:6–7).

He urged Timothy to be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus, to share in hardship as a good soldier, to endure suffering, and to fight the good fight of faith (2 Timothy 2:1, 3; 4:5; 1 Timothy 1:18; 6:12).

In short, sacrificial ministry for the church calls for courage rooted in the Lord. If we are to be a people who speaks the truth in love to one another, we must rely on God’s power and grace to faithfully face our fears and weaknesses.

In this last verse we find our fourth and fifth principles of sacrificial ministry for the church.

Look at verse **12 But concerning Apollos our brother, I encouraged him greatly to come to you with the brethren; and it was not at all *his* desire to come now, but he will come when he has opportunity.**

The fourth principle is that sacrificial ministry prioritizes unity above individual preferences. **Apollos** was a well-known and gifted teacher. In Acts 18:24–28 he is described as eloquent,

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mighty in the Scriptures, fervent in spirit, and greatly used by God to minister to the church in Corinth.

However, people began to use his ministry in the divisions within the church. Some said, “I am of Paul,” others said, “I am of Apollos” (1 Corinthians 1:12). Because of this, some commentators believe that Apollos’s refusal to return to Corinth came from a desire not to stir those divisions further. That explanation fits well with the context of the letter.

This principle also fits well Paul’s instruction to them that leaders are to be humble servants always willing to lay down their rights and personal preferences (1 Corinthians 8:9–13; 9:1–23; 10:23–33). While Apollos may have wanted to go immediately, he instead prioritized what was good for the church and the unity of Christ’s body.

The fifth principle is that sacrificial ministry for the church respects the freedom and calling of fellow servants. Paul says that he **“encouraged [Apollos] greatly”** to go to the Corinthians. This tells us there was no rivalry, jealousy, or competition between Paul and Apollos.

Paul did not view Apollos as a threat, and he didn’t attempt to use his apostolic authority control him. Instead, he urged him to minister where the need was great and gave Apollos the freedom to make the decision.

Apollos declined for the time being. And Paul respected that decision. Paul simply notes that it was **“not at all *his* desire to come now, but he will come when he has opportunity.”** This demonstrates a practical trust in God’s sovereignty. Both these men were committed to the gospel and Church, and they trusted the Lord to direct their efforts according to His timing.

This is an important lesson for us as we minister in the church. As servants of Christ, we may differ about the what, when, why, how, and where to serve, but when we disagree, we should do so without compromising the love and unity of the church. Like Paul we can lay down our preferences and trust in God’s sovereign control over the matter.

Now when it comes to sacrifice for ministry for the church I am reminded about some of the testimonies that were shared at church regarding community groups. Last year, there was a husband and wife who shared about how much their Community Group was a blessing to them.

“There is no perfect day or time for Community Group, it’s always a sacrifice. But it is a sacrifice that is worth far more than the cost.

Sacrifice isn’t as great a cost when it is done in love. And that leads us to our final point for this morning.

III. A Devoted Love for the Church (13–24)

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Now this is a longer section, and Paul gives both instruction and examples within in it. I believe one of the themes that runs throughout this section is that it displays a devoted love for the church.

We find that devoted love in the first exhortation. Let's look at verses **13–14**.

There are five commands contained in these two short verses and each command connects to the various issues that have been addressed in this letter.

First, **“Be on the alert.”**

The Corinthians had grown careless in their spiritual lives. They drifted into false teaching about the resurrection, became worldly by participating in feasts offered to idols, relaxed their moral standards, and allowed disorder and corruption to creep into their worship. In many ways, they had taken their foot off the gas and were no longer watchful over their souls.

The same danger confronts us. A day without the Word becomes a week. Our prayer life can fade and be reduced to a routine before meals or bedtime. Busyness and wrong priorities can crowd out regular fellowship, and before we realize it, our spiritual lives are dry and dull.

That is why Paul's command is so necessary. We must remain watchful, because our hearts are still prone to wander and easily drawn away from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ. Staying alert is not a practice for super Christians, it is essential for the Christian life.

Second, verse 13 continues, **“to stand firm in the faith.”** The Corinthians had come to believe that the wisdom and philosophies of their day had more to offer than God's Word and the gospel. They were looking to the world for direction, guidance, and validation, it revealed that they lost a confidence in the sufficiency of God's Word.

The same challenge confronts us today. God's people must resist the influence of secular psychologies, ideologies, and cultural trends that subtly compete with the authority of Scripture. To stand firm in the faith is to remain anchored in the truth of God's Word, and trust that His Word is sufficient to equip us, make us adequate, and sustain us in every season of life.

The third command is **“to act like men.”** Paul desired for the Corinthians to grow up and to put off fleshly immaturity. He repeated this instruction throughout the book.

1 Corinthians 3:1 “And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to infants in Christ.”

1 Corinthians 14:20 “Brethren, do not be children in your thinking; yet in evil be infants, but in your thinking be mature.”

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As Christians we need to press on to putting off our old sinful and selfish ways and put on the selfless maturity of Christ.

Fourth, he commands them to **“be strong.”** Yet this strength is not found within ourselves. The only way a believer can obey this command is when they have recognized their own weakness and have learned to fully depend upon the Lord. The strongest Christians are those who rely most on the infinite strength of their Savior.

In verse 14 we have the fifth and final command, **“Let all that you do be done in love.”** This is one of the major themes of the entire book. Paul devoted an entire chapter to instructing them in the beauty and importance of love. This was a church given to division and disunity. The problem was their lack of love. So he again reminds them of how crucial love is.

Next, we find some more examples of faithful ministers who demonstrate a genuine love for the church. Glance down at verses **15–16 Now I urge you, brethren (you know the household of Stephanas, that they were the first fruits of Achaia, and that they have devoted themselves for ministry to the saints), 16 that you also be in subjection to such men and to everyone who helps in the work and labors.**

We don't have a lot of information on Stephanas in Scripture. Here him and his household are described as the first converts from Achaia. In fact, 1:16 tells us that Paul baptized Stephanus and his household. This family exemplified devoted service to the church.

Notice the phrase **“they have devoted themselves for ministry to the saints.”** This communicates a consistent, loving, sacrificial commitment to caring for others in the church.

Look again at verses **17–18 I rejoice over the coming of Stephanas and Fortunatus and Achaicus, because they have supplied what was lacking on your part. 18 For they have refreshed my spirit and yours. Therefore acknowledge such men.**

Stephanus, Fortunatus, and Achaicus, also visited Paul in Ephesus. They came from Corinth and ministered in practical ways to Paul. They supplied for Paul's needs on behalf of the church. Their ministry was a refreshment to Paul, and to the Corinthians.

So, Paul instructs the church to submit to such men with love and honor their service, acknowledging that this kind of devotion strengthens the body of Christ. These examples remind us that loving devoted ministry is what builds up the health of the church and the response of the church to such servants is to lovingly recognize and encourage them in their ministry.

Then we find two more examples of faithful in verse **19 The churches of Asia greet you. Aquila and Prisca greet you heartily in the Lord, with the church that is in their house.**

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Aquila and Prisca (Priscilla) were tentmakers who had accompanied Paul from Corinth to Ephesus. They exemplify a devoted love for the church. They not only served alongside Paul in ministry but opened their home as a place for the church to gather. They were committed to nurturing the body of Christ.

They invested their time, resources, and life into others. Through their service and hospitality, Aquila and Priscilla modeled a love worthy to be emulated.

20 All the brethren greet you. Greet one another with a holy kiss. 21 The greeting is in my own hand—Paul.

The holy kiss (cf. 2 Cor. 13:12; Rom. 16:16; 1 Thes. 5:26; 1 Peter 5:14) was a tangible expression of the love, forgiveness, and unity that should characterize the church. It symbolized the family bond between believers, reflected a true devotion to one another that went beyond words.

Now, while this is John Marc's preferred way to greet people after visiting Latin America, we don't have to kiss someone today to express our greetings of love. The same spirit of affection and care can be expressed in a lot of ways: through a warm smile, a handshake, a heartfelt hug, or in genuine words of encouragement and concern. What matters is the true heart of love and devotion behind the gesture.

Verse 22 reads, **"If anyone does not love the Lord, he is to be accursed. Maranatha."**

The verb **love** here, *philei*, and it expresses an intimate, affectionate devotion. It's a love for Christ that permeates our life and fuels our affections for Him.

Notice, Paul invokes God's judgment on those who lack this love. This shows that a mere profession of loving Christ is not enough. We must be captivated by His glory and grace and have those realities transform our heart and desires for more of Him.

Our love for Christ is persistent and unceasing. A believer never grows weary of Christ's glory. We never tire of meditating on His character and work. One author, Dustin Bengtson, said, **"As believers, we never move past the love of Christ. We never tire of the love of Christ. A true believer is one who never gets over the profound words of the childhood song 'Jesus loves me! This I know, for the Bible tells me so.'"**

It is the same love that causes the Church to rejoice that her foundation is Jesus Christ. This is the hymn we will sing here in just a few moments. It celebrates that Jesus is our Lord, the one who "came and sought [us], to be his holy bride; with his own blood he bought [us], and for [our] life he died."

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To this Paul adds the word **Maranatha**, which means “Lord, come!” This is a plea for Christ’s return and it’s a reminder that our devotion to Him always looks forward to that day. We keep our eyes and heart fixed on the day when we will see Him face to face and fully delight in Him.

Paul’s words in this verse are direct and uncompromising. They reveal the truth to truly know Christ is to love Him. If we do not find ourselves drawn to Him with affection, adoration, and devotion, it is a strong indication that we do not yet know Him. Genuine knowledge of Christ is inseparable from heartfelt love.

If you find that your heart is cold toward Jesus, that you do not long for Him or desire to glorify Him above all else, take this as a loving warning from Scripture. To know Jesus is to love Him.

The good news is that Christ’s love is freely offered to you now. He is the Savior who died for your sins, who bore the curse you deserved, and who calls you into fellowship with Himself. He is the only way you can be reconciled to God and have eternal life.

Will you turn from your sin and trust in Him today? Will you surrender your heart to Jesus and begin to love Him with the devotion He deserves?

Come to Him now. Let Him be your treasure, your joy, your all. For in knowing Him and loving Him, you find life that never fades, and a love that never grows cold.

Paul knows that this love for Christ and love for one another, and truthfully all faithfulness in the Christian life is only possible with by the grace that Christ supplies. That is why he says in verse **23 The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you.**

And then he ends on one final note of love in verse **24 My love be with you all in Christ Jesus. Amen.**

The letter of 1 Corinthians ends with two of the richest words in the Christian faith: **grace** and **love**. The gospel is a gospel of grace. And when we truly experience the grace Christ offers, it inevitably produces a love for Christ who saved us and a love for our brothers and sisters whom He also has redeemed. For a letter that has addressed so many serious problems, this is not just a fitting ending, it is a beautiful one.

As we conclude our study of 1 Corinthians, let us ask the Lord to grow our love for Christ, the Head of the church; to grow our love for His body, the church; and to increase our love for those who still need to hear and believe the gospel of grace.

Let’s pray.

Benediction: **2 Corinthians 13:14 “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all.”**