

# Three Building Blocks of a Great Church

## 1 Corinthians 16:1–24 (ESV)

**INTRODUCTION:** We come to the conclusion of our study of Paul's letter to the Church of Corinth, and what a study it has been. Not only have we walked chapter by chapter, thought by thought through the book, but over 60 of you literally walked down the street of Corinth and saw the city where these things took place.

There are so many issues that Paul has covered through this letter. Remember, each sermon from this series is available on our website along with the notes I carry with me to the pulpit each Sunday. I promise you, you will learn more the second time you listen than you did the first.

As we said last week Paul's letters to the churches have certain discernible parts. There is always a **doctrinal** portion, there is always a **practical** portion, and the closing is always the same. He always concludes with a call to **partner** with him in the ongoing missionary endeavor.

- **Romans 15-16** is all about the church's mission **Romans 15:20 (ESV)** <sup>20</sup> and thus I make it my ambition to preach the gospel, not where Christ has already been named, lest I build on someone else's foundation. Then he invites the Roman's to partner with him financially so that he may go from them into Spain. Which in Paul's understanding was the uttermost part of the Earth.
- **Galatians 6:6 (ESV)** <sup>6</sup> Let the one who is taught the word share all good things with the one who teaches. In other words, give so that the preaching of the word may be magnified.
- **Ephesians 6:18–20 (ESV)** He asks the Ephesian Church to partner in prayer - <sup>18</sup> praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, <sup>19</sup> **and also for me,** that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, <sup>20</sup> for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.
- **Colossians 4:2–3 (ESV)** <sup>2</sup> Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving. <sup>3</sup> At the same time, **pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word,** to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison—
- **Philippians 4:18 (ESV)** <sup>18</sup> I have received full payment, and more. I am well supplied, having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God.

**So we should not be surprised that 1 Corinthians ends with a similar summons to be personally engaged in the mission of preaching the Gospel to the world.**

I'm calling this sermon - ***Three Building Blocks of a Great Church***. Most of us have attended more than one church in our lifetime. Some of us have been in big church, small church, highly contemporary churches, highly traditional churches. Some have attended more liturgical churches, and very casual churches.

Frankly, I think I've seen church done any way one can imagine church being done. There are cowboy churches, biker churches, there are even clown churches (*Trust me, I've preached there*).

But in spite of style, in spite of liturgy, or government... there are some churches that have, "IT" and some that don't. IT is that unmistakable something that sets them apart, IT is palatable if you are paying attention.

People arrive with a measure of expectation, they leave with a sense of direction. Once you attend a church with IT, you can never again live without IT.

IT cannot be manufactured, or faked. IT cannot be mass produced. GOD must give IT. I've seen churches with good music, good preaching, that don't have IT.

I've seen churches with sorry music and less than wonderful preaching that DO have IT.

How does a church get IT? I believe chapter 16 tells us.

## **THREE BUILDING BLOCKS OF A GREAT CHURCH -**

### **1. Financial Investment -**

You may not know this, but typically when I am asked to speak, or be interviewed for a podcast, typically they want me to speak building a generous church. Each year we turn our report into the State Convention and that is what stands out - a dramatic increase in giving.

**But**, if you have been here any length of time you know I don't preach on giving very much. Why? Well frankly, I don't like preachers who harp on giving all the time. So I don't preach on it unless it's in the text.. ***but when it's in the text I fall upon it with all vigor***. Well today, that is the case.

Notice letter, "a"

- a. **A Strategic Emphasis - 1 Now concerning the *collection for the saints*: as I directed the churches of Galatia, so you also are to do.**

Paul begins this final portion of his letter by reminding them of an offering he

wishes for them to participate in, specifically an offering for the suffering saints in Jerusalem. Biblically, the word SAINTS has reference to any person who is a follower of Jesus Christ, this isn't referring to special class of Christians, but any Christian.

During this period of time the Jews were suffering greatly at the hands of the Roman Empire. They had been driven out of the city of Rome by Tiberius in the year 19AD. The only thing worse than being a Jew (in Rome's eyes) was to be a Messianic Jew. So the Messianic, Christian Jews who lived in Jerusalem were suffering greatly. Unable to trade, unable to work, many times imprisoned. So Paul wished to take an offering for their relief.

Notice, this is not for poor people in general, but poor brethren in particular.

Now, what is that important? Well, God desires that you give faithfully, but also **emotionally**. God loves a "*Cheerful*" giver. The Greek word there is **HILARION**, from which we get our word hilarious. God wants you to laugh with joy when you give! Have you ever done that? ***Paul know that for giving to be emotionally engaging it must ultimately be about people.***

***Christians don't give passionately to programs, but to people.***

**ILLUSTRATION:** Growing up, I remember when my father came to Christ. We became a regular fixture in our little church. The only time our family would miss church was when the missionaries came. We went to Quincey's and ate yeast rolls.

I asked my dad why we didn't go hear the missionaries. He answered, "Because if you've seen one tiki hut, you've seen them all. For dad the mission of the church was about as exciting as a day of watching CSPAN. Then I joined a church in college and I noticed that the annual missions conference was the biggest thing they did all year. I asked what the difference was and the Pastor told me, "We don't let the missionaries talk about food and culture... we ask them to tell us about changed lives".

Well suddenly, people would take off work to hear that. They would give an enormous amount. Why? ***People don't give to programs, they give to people.***

MY DESIRE, is that when you think of opportunities for strategic generosity like our **Love Offering for Jesus on Dec. 25th**. You don't think immediately about bricks and mortar, bank loans and construction... think about the boys and girls who will be trained daily in those classes. Think about the couples who will be married there. Think about the Christian conferences that we will host.

Then, every baptism you see, you will know that you had a part in that. Every

time a family joins the church, you had a part in that.

**b. A Regular Rhythm**

<sup>2</sup> On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up.

So notice GIVING is correlated with WORSHIP. In other words, there was a regular time each Lord's day they were to give.

**Someone has said**, *"Three books are required for worship, the Bible, the hymnbook and the check book"*.

If regular giving is not a part of your Sunday experience - you are missing out.

Then notice - each of you is to put something aside and store it up.

So this isn't a few heavy hitters, EACH ONE OF YOU.

- If a christian **teenager** gets an allowance, she should bring a portion of that with her to church to give.
- If a **retired** couple gets a Social Security check, they are to bring a portion of that check to church and give.

**c. A Proportional Commitment** - <sup>2</sup> On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, *as he may prosper*, so that there will be no collecting when I come. <sup>3</sup>

**Percentage giving.** Throughout the Bible, a 10th or a tithe was always the starting point. It was used before the law, after the law, and throughout church history.

If you make \$100,000 then \$10,000 is your tithe. Someone said, "I make \$100,000 and I tithe \$1500. No you don't, you don't tithe at all.

If you make \$10 million, you're tithe is \$1 Million. You see?

The goal is not equal gifts, but equal engagement. If you take all of my giving over a lifetime, it will not equal what some people in this church could do in a single year.

But my engagement and my worship is equal to theirs. You see? It makes absolutely no difference how much you make or how little you make - it matters what is happening in you and through you.

- d. **It is a Secure Procedure** - And when I arrive, I will send those whom you accredit by letter to carry your gift to Jerusalem. <sup>4</sup> If it seems advisable that I should go also, they will accompany me.

So notice, they select people whom they believe to be responsible, trustworthy people to physically carry that offering to Jerusalem.

When you give here the money is collected by a team, two or more men.

It is counted and recounted by a team.

It is counted again at the bank.

We bring an accountant in regularly to check our books.

With the advent of online giving security has become even higher. No longer do people have to count each penny, it goes straight into an account.

There is one person who does not touch a penny of the offering at this church - that is me. If you ever hear that I have embezzled money, you can know for certain that is not true. Now, I can't speak for these other guys :).

If someone hands me their offering, I say the box is right over there.

*There is a financial partnership...*

## 2. Exciting Opportunities

<sup>5</sup> I will visit you after passing through Macedonia, for I intend to pass through Macedonia, <sup>6</sup> and perhaps I will stay with you or even spend the winter, so that you may help me on my journey, wherever I go. <sup>7</sup> For I do not want to see you now just in passing. I hope to spend some time with you, if the Lord permits. <sup>8</sup> But I will stay in **Ephesus** until Pentecost, <sup>9</sup> for a wide door for effective work has opened to me, and there are many adversaries.

Those words may seem to us, just a simple travel plan. But for the Corinthians it was like the trailer for a blockbuster movie. He was whetting their appetite for stories he would tell when he made his visit.

Now think of all that happened to Paul in Ephesus...

- **There was an extraordinary outpouring of the Holy Spirit - Acts 19** <sup>2</sup> He said to them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" And they said to him, "No, we have not even heard whether there is a Holy Spirit." <sup>3</sup> And he said, "Into what then were you baptized?" And they said, "Into John's baptism." <sup>4</sup> Paul said, "John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in Him who was coming after him, that is, in Jesus." <sup>5</sup> When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. <sup>6</sup> And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began speaking with tongues and prophesying.

- **There were extraordinary miracles**

<sup>11</sup> God was performing **extraordinary miracles** by the hands of Paul,

<sup>12</sup> so that handkerchiefs or aprons were even carried from his body to the sick, and the diseases left them and the evil spirits went out.

- **There was extraordinary repentance**

<sup>19</sup> And many of those who practiced magic brought their books together and *began*

burning them in the sight of everyone; and they counted up the price of them and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver. <sup>20</sup> So the word of the Lord was growing mightily and prevailing.

One of the things God is leading me to do more of in the days ahead is to talk about all of the things that happen behind the scenes in ministry. Why? Because you are partners in these things.

YOUR prayers are being answered.  
YOUR seeds are producing a harvest.  
YOUR service is making it possible.

The Corinthians were personally vested in the work Paul would do at Ephesus. They couldn't wait for him to visit and share the stories with them. I want you to feel the same way about the work here.

When you walk down the children's wing of the church and see the amazing artwork, remember that is YOUR ministry.

*There is a financial partnership...Exciting Opportunities...*

### **3. Intentional Encouragement**

#### **Encouragement is fuel for perseverance.**

- Ministries die in a deficit of encouragement.
- Marriages end in a deficit of encouragement.
- Children rebel in a deficit of encouragement.

There is nothing we can do that is so great that it can't be undone by discouragement. There is no situation so bad that it can't be helped by a good dose of encouragement.

#### **A. Encourage YOUR Staff**

*Paul mentions...*

- **Timothy -**

<sup>10</sup> When Timothy comes, see that ***you put him at ease among you***, for he is doing the work of the Lord, as I am. <sup>11</sup> So ***let no one despise him***.

*Can you imagine someone starts griping and gossiping about Timothy at Corinth.. and*

someone says, “I’m not going to let you do that”. He is one of my Pastors. If he is wrong, talk to him. But if you just don’t like him... you are wrong.

11b. Help him on his way in peace, that he may return to me, for I am expecting him with the brothers.

### Hebrews 13:17 (ESV)

17 Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. **Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.**

#### • Apollos -

2 Now concerning our brother Apollos, I strongly urged him to visit you with the other brothers, but it was not at all his will to come now. He will come when he has opportunity.

Remember who Apollos is? The one they were championing more than Paul in the early chapters. Paul didn’t respond to that by trying to sabotage the ministry of Apollos. He said, I’m strongly urging Apollos to visit! He will bless your socks off.

## B. Encourage Non-Staff Leaders

13 Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong. 14 Let all that you do be done in love. 15 Now I urge you, brothers—you know that the household of **Stephanas** were the first converts in Achaia, and that they have devoted themselves to the service of the saints— 16 be subject to such as these, and to every fellow worker and laborer. 17 I rejoice at the coming of **Stephanas** and **Fortunatus** and **Achaicus**, because they have made up for your absence, 18 for they refreshed my spirit as well as yours. Give recognition to such people.

You know, this church is full of people who serve faithfully. But there are some that have been like unpaid staff members. You ought to watch for them and honor them greatly. Look them in the eye and tell them what they mean to you and to this church.

## C. Encourage Other Churches

19 The churches of Asia send you greetings. Aquila and Prisca, together with the church in their house, send you hearty greetings in the Lord. 20 All the brothers send you greetings. Greet one another with a holy kiss. *In our context and side huh is sufficient. :)*

21 I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. 22 If anyone has no love for the Lord, let him be accursed. Our Lord, come! 23 The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you. 24 My love be with you all in Christ Jesus. Amen.

## CONCLUSION/INVITATION:

- How do you become the sort of Christian who can give cheerfully to your church, over decades?
- How do you make mission and ministry something that you are more concerned and excited about than the next political election or football season?
- How do you become the most encouraging person in the church? The sort of person that everyone wants to be around?

In Paul's second letter to the Corinthians he speaks of the Churches of Macedonia who did all of these things well.

### **2 Corinthians 8:5 (ESV)**

<sup>5</sup> and this, not as we expected, but they ***gave themselves first to the Lord*** and then by the will of God to us.

**The Anglicans had a very prescribed wedding ceremony in the BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER. For years it was the standard for wedding ceremonies. Some of you may have used it...**

**When it came to the giving of rings... here was the line that was repeated,**

With this ring, I thee wed, with all my worldly goods, I thee endow.

In other words, the gift of this ring is a testimony that all I am or ever hope to be, is given in its entirety to you. Today we hedge our bets, we get a good prenup. It's not supposed to be that way. Biblical marriage is a giving of one's self entirely to another person.

In the same way - each time we give to the Lord it is a reminder that all we are an ever hope to be, is given over to HIM. That is biblical Christianity.

A Church of people who give themselves to the Lord in that way - will have IT.

