

## 1 Corinthians 16:1-24 A Christian Response to Poverty & Need

A sermon delivered at Calvary Chapel DC Metro  
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With Thanksgiving only a few days behind us, most of us are already thinking about Christmas gifts, and perhaps in addition to your usual gift list, you're also thinking about charitable gifts this year. We've seen the big banners for Oxfam in the mall. Your child's school is asking for donations for needy families. Maybe you've received a gift catalogue in the mail encouraging you to buy chickens for some poor family overseas, or a bicycle for some missionary in India. Or maybe you've heard your favorite ministry asking you to consider them with your year-end giving. What do we do about all these opportunities and obligations that come our way? How should we respond?

Well, we'll find some answers here in the last chapter of 1 Corinthians as we look at several ways that Christians were helping other Christians in need.

Before we jump into all that, I have to make sure we grasp the context and the timing of all this. Remember last week we looked at the importance of the resurrection, the central point of the gospel message of Christianity, and after it was all said and done, Paul wrote

**1 Cor 15: 58 Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.**

And then, after all that, we roll right into a description of what that work might look like, as Paul mentions a collection for the church in Jerusalem, which was going through hard times.

**1 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.**

This is what Paul has in mind as a normal response to the work of Christ in my life – that it will give me a concern for others. In this case, a concern for a church hundreds of miles away full of people I've never met. Google maps says you can walk from Corinth to Jerusalem but it's going to take 430 hours (that's 18 days with no rest) and you'll need to catch a ferry to get from Greece over to Turkey.

So, what was going on here? Why did the church in Jerusalem need money? And why was Paul asking the churches in Corinth and Galatia which were so far away to help? Well, let

me give you a little background. After Jesus rose from the grave He met with His disciples and told them to wait in Jerusalem until the Holy Spirit came. That happened at Pentecost, which is a Jewish religious festival - Peter got up and preached to the crowds and thousands of people became Christians one day. You can read all about it in the book of Acts.

But, many of these people came from out of town. They didn't know anything about Jesus, so they wanted to learn as much as they could from the disciples who had just spent the past three years with Him. And that meant these new believers from out of town needed a place in town to stay. So, some of the Christians in Jerusalem took them in. But at the same time, the Jewish religious leaders weren't all that thrilled about what was going on, and they started discriminating against these new Christians who had no where else to go for any help.

You have to understand, Rome was the ruling power of the day, and the Roman Empire wasn't full of social programs to help people like our government. There was no social security, no unemployment, no federal student loans, no disability insurance, no food stamps. If you were in need, anything you received came from your religious group, your friends, or some rich person you had a relationship with - the Latin term was your patron - someone who would lend you or give you money in a time of need in exchange for you telling people how great they were and helping with whatever they might need.

But most of the first Christians didn't have such relationships because they weren't Greeks or Romans. They were Jews and Jews also tended to take care of their own, primarily through the Temple and local synagogues. Widows and others in need could find relief by appealing to the religious community.

But not all of the Jews received Jesus as the promised Messiah, and those who did were often forced out of the synagogue - you even see that in John's gospel - in Chapter 9 - Jesus heals a man who was blind from birth. The religious leaders don't believe that Jesus did it, so they go to the man's parents and ask them whether their son was really born blind and his parents don't want to answer the question: (verse 22) ["they feared the Jews, for the Jews had agreed already that if anyone confessed He was the Christ, he would be put out of the synagogue."](#) You would be cut off from the central point of the community, in other words, cut off from the center of your identity as an ethnic Jew.

Becoming a Christian in Israel really cost you something. You gained everything from a spiritual and eternal perspective, but you lost a lot in the here and now. It's not usually like that for us here in America, but it's still that way in many places in the world today. I have known former Muslims, former Hindus, former atheists, whose families didn't want anything to do with them because they received Christ.

So, the early Christians lost their social net. But, they found that they had been adopted into the family of God and they discovered that often God would meet their needs through other Christians. Those who had homes opened them up for others to stay or for whole groups to come and worship. Archaeologists tell us the first Christian church building

dates back to the 300's. For the first several centuries Christians met in homes because they couldn't own a building for worship. Other Christians sold their homes, sold their property, and gave money to the church to use for ministry, again we see all of this described in the first chapters of the book of Acts.

And so, the early church in Jerusalem did alright for a few years by taking care of themselves and each other. But then, in the late 40s – about fifteen years after Jesus' resurrection, all of Israel and the surrounding area was hit with a famine and it was even more difficult for the young church and it's members to survive. Now they needed outside help and that's what Paul was trying to gather for them.

There are several things we can learn from all of this, depending on which side of the issue we stand on. The first thing we learn, by standing on the side of the church in Jerusalem, is that loving God didn't insulate these early Christians from the difficulties being faced by everyone else in the region. The famine hit everyone regardless of creed. And the same is true for us; loving God is no guarantee that bad things won't happen in your life. But just because bad things come along that doesn't mean God has abandoned you. In fact, things might be happening right now to help you: like Paul working with other churches outside the region, in areas that were not affected by the famine, to collect some relief money and bring it to those in need.

I know it's hard to imagine, especially as you're the one going through the difficult times, but it's possible that one reason God allows difficulty to come your way is so that you can learn a greater sense of dependence on Him than you've ever had before, and so that you can see Him move in ways that you wouldn't otherwise see. And, it's possible, that by you going through a season of difficulty, you're giving someone else the chance to worship God and serve Him by doing something helpful for you. I know that's a mind-bender, but it's true. Sometimes, when your life hurts, it gives another person the chance to serve. To be your help. To prove Christian love.

And look at that from the other side, put yourself in the church in Corinth hearing about what was going on in Jerusalem – have you ever considered that God has given you the time, the money, the abilities or the resources He has, SO THAT you can use them in ministering to others?

Paul said that everyone in Corinth was supposed to put something aside, look at it, in verse 2: "[storing up as he may prosper.](#)" Is God prospering you so that you can give? Did God give you that inheritance, that raise, that bonus, so that you could give more to help others? Is your giving proportionate to your prosperity? And, if you were to give a little more, if you were to be a little more generous, a little more open handed, is it possible that God would prosper you *even more*?

You see, this is where all those television preachers and those who cling to a prosperity gospel rip us off from the truth. They say you just need to send them \$100 and God will give you a \$1000 – you need to sow a seed of faith and God will bless you.

The conclusions they make and the promises they offer are a bunch of rubbish. But every lie contains a nugget of truth - and there is truth to the fact that sometimes God wants to bless you financially or materially SO THAT you can have the chance to give more. The Bible says we're stewards and sometimes God wants to put more in your section of the warehouse so that you can play a part in moving it over to point B where it's needed. You're blessed so that you might become a blessing. Did you ever think about it that way?

Let me give you a few other ways to think. Paul talks about this collection throughout the New Testament, you find him discussing it in Acts, in Romans, and he goes into detail in 2 Corinthians 8-9. All in all, he uses nine different words to express what's going on.

First, here in verse 1, he calls it a *logia*, which means an "extra collection," it's something done on top of your normal giving. It's the complete opposite of a tax; this is something that is freely done because the givers *want* to help. We need to take care of ourselves, our family, and our local church, but then sometimes, on top of that, we want to make an extra gift to another ministry or another need, we want to make a *logia*.

In verse 3 he also calls it a *charis*, a "grace" - did you ever think about that? You're showing grace to others by your giving. Their poverty, or their need, might be a disgrace to them, and you have the chance to bring grace back. YOU get to do that, in the name of Christ. That's powerful, in some cases, it's life changing.

Over in 2 Cor (8:4; 9:13; and Romans 15:6) he calls it *koinonia*, which means something like "fellowship," or "sharing." You're taking some of what you have and sharing with someone in need. It costs you something, but what it costs is usually nothing compared to what it feels like for them to receive.

He also calls it a *diakonia*, the root of our English word 'deacon' (2 Cor 8:4; 9:1, 12, 13). Deacons are people who help with practical ministries in the church. If you want to help out practically but you can't, if work or family or age or health won't let you go, why not consider sending your money? It's a part of you - you gave hours and weeks of your life to earn it. Your money can go places you can't go, so send it to do what you'd like to see done if you were there yourself.

But maybe you can go, and sometimes that's the answer. It's good to support the church and other Christians; but sometimes God also wants you to give of your self - to bring comfort and encouragement to others. As we finish the chapter Paul talks about the struggles he and Timothy are going through and how people, not just paychecks, have been their greatest source of encouragement.

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 And 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.

Now think about this – Paul, the guy who is trying to help the struggling church in Jerusalem says he’s got another ministry going on over in Ephesus and things are going well there, but there’s also a lot of opposition, “*many adversaries.*” Shouldn’t the guy who is trying so hard to help others get a bit of a break? And then he mentions Timothy, a younger guy who is new to the ministry and he’s still growing a bit in his confidence, trying to get his legs underneath himself, he’s been despised and afraid as he serves the Lord. Christians, are you sensing a theme here? God doesn’t promise everyone a pet unicorn and a rainbow.

What about you? Are you going through any difficulty right now? Are you dealing with some difficult people in your life? Has life thrown you a curve ball? Doors that you thought were going to open now look like they’re shut? Diagnosis came back positive? Promotion didn’t come through? Is someone out to get you?

If so, I want you to know – plenty of great Christians, throughout history have gone through times of tremendous need. They have suffered from ordinary issues of life – accidents, illnesses, disease, and disasters that affect individuals or entire cities or regions. We live on a fallen planet waiting for Christ to return. But, until He does, we’re still affected by sin in the hearts of other human beings, the realities of living on a sin-scarred planet, and the very real opposition of Satan and other demonic spirits.

But, we’re also under the watchful eye of God and all his angels, we’re indwelt by the Holy Spirit if you’re a believer in Christ, and we’re part of a church that spans that the globe and the timeline of history. And as we saw in our study of the Holy Spirit and His gifts in Chapter 12, God is equipping other Christians to impact our lives.

So, part of the solution for the difficulties being experienced by Paul, Timothy, the church in Jerusalem, and even by you and me, involves other Christians taking action. And so Paul admonishes the Corinthians who tended toward selfishness:

13 Watch, stand fast in the faith, be brave, be strong. 14 Let all *that you do* be done with love.

And then he gives them a commendable example:

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.

They have devoted themselves to the ministry of the saints – they have made it their business to take care of others. Take note of that, be inspired by that.

And then, Paul tells the Corinthians how he himself has been on the receiving end of that ministry.

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.

Paul was thankful that as he faced great opposition some men showed up with some sort of a gift, maybe material or financial, or both. But it wasn't just what they brought; it was the fact that they came, and that "refreshed" Paul's spirit.

Each year, we try to send Pastor Doug and Rose out to visit some of our missionaries. And they usually bring some special things along – Starbucks coffee, some candy, special treats; whatever will be a blessing to the missionaries. And those things are nice, sometimes even necessary, but the biggest thing they bring is their relationship with the Lord, which has been cultivated over the years. They go, and they sit with the missionaries. They hear about the difficulties they're facing, the discouragements they have faced, the challenges looming on the horizon. And they take them out to dinner, and they sit and drink a cup of coffee, and they pray together, and they encourage those missionaries. They refresh their spirits.

As many of you know, we're trying to help Calvary Chapel Reston Station identify a new pastor. Right now they have no pastoral staff over there at all. So we sent over Sean and Caryn, and Sean has been doing most of the teaching on Sundays. But when they heard about what was going on, two other families went over as well. Gil and Arelis went over just to support and encourage Sean – to be there for him in case he needs anything. And Auggie and Lisa went over as well – Auggie has been teaching a few times here and there to give Sean a break, but really, they've been sticking around even when Auggie isn't teaching because they want to encourage Sean and the rest of the body. They're there to refresh and encourage that church as it goes through a significant transition.

What about you? Has God ever sent someone into your life to bring encouragement, hope, or refreshing at a difficult time? Nothing else in the situation changed – Paul was still in Ephesus and still had many adversaries, the missionaries are still on the field facing many difficulties, the church in Reston is still without a full-time pastor, but someone else showed up who loved the Lord and that made all the difference.

And maybe that's what you need – and maybe that's why you need to get connected to others believers here at church. Fellowship is a powerful thing. Knowing that you're not going through this alone is a huge motivator.



Those of you who are married need to consider this about your spouse – how many times have they encouraged you through difficult times? How much have they done for you – helping you study, taking on chores so you could give more time to a project, picking up the slack while you deploy or travel for business, running errands for you – how many times has your spouse filled in the gap in an effort to bless you? Have you thanked them? Have you thanked God for them?

Let me also ask – who might God want to use you to be this encouragement to? He’s not asking you to go and solve all their problems – He’s not asking you to fix everything. But does He want to use you to go and spend time with someone, maybe even just virtually through a text, or a call, or a video chat – does God want you to reorganize your schedule and go bring a little hope, a little help, a little refreshing to someone else? You don’t have to go to a different country, or even a different church, maybe it’s someone in this church, or in your neighborhood, or in your family. Ask God to open your eyes to see the needs around you and to show you how He wants you to respond.

And you know what? Maybe the answer is no. Maybe it’s a great idea, but you just can’t do it right now, that’s OK. Maybe you’re like Apollos in verse 12 – I’m strongly urging you to go, but you are quite unwilling at this time; however, you will go when you have a convenient time.

If you’re sure that’s true, if you’re sure that you’re working on something else that God says is more important right now, then fine. Just because there’s a need doesn’t mean we’re all supposed to respond by going. But some of us are. Don’t let yourself off too easily. Someone needs to be the one to go. Even Paul who was visited is eventually going to come and visit Corinth, but for now, he wraps up his letter by reminding the Corinthians once again that they’re not in this alone – there are many other Christians in this thing called the body of Christ.

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.

That was more of a cultural thing – a strong handshake will do for most Americans.

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!

Now, that might sound a little strong, but remember that he already said that no one calling Jesus accursed is saved.

23 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ *be* with you. 24 My love *be* with you all in Christ Jesus. Amen.

It's a pretty remarkable way to end a letter to a church filled with so many problems – “[My love be with you all in Christ Jesus.](#)” But it's the kind of ending we would expect from a man whose life had been truly marked by salvation in Christ. He's always looking out for the greater good for everyone – whether that can be achieved with his wallet or his watch.

So, what about you? What marks of Christ are there in your life – as giver, or as a receiver – what can you point to as evidence in your life of God's goodness? Be on the lookout this Christmas season. Look out for things God might want you to give toward, and be on the lookout for things He might be giving to you. Look out for people He may want you to go to, and for people He is bringing to you. But behind it all be on the lookout for God – He came once as a babe in a manger, He's coming again as a King and you won't need or want anything else for all of eternity.

Let's pray.