

FIRST CORINTHIANS

Chapter 16

The Collection for the Lord's People

Now concerning the collection for the saints: as I directed the churches of Galatia, so you also are to do. 2 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. 3 And when I arrive, I will send those whom you accredit by letter to carry your gift to Jerusalem. 4 If it seems advisable that I should go also, they will accompany me.

In this concluding chapter Paul turns to a number of ways in which the saints in Corinth, Paul himself, and his coworkers can show themselves to be “steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord” (1 Cor 15:58). First, he points to the collection for the saints in Jerusalem and urges the Corinthians to give that project special attention (16:1–4). Then he speaks of the itinerary he has planned through Macedonia and Corinth, but says he cannot embark on his journey as yet because of the door, great and “effective” (ἐνεργής, 16:9—a word from the same family as ἔργον, “work,” in 15:58), that stands open to him in Ephesus (16:5–9). Then he turns to his coworkers: Timothy, engaged in the “work” of the Lord (16:10–11); Apollos likewise (16:12). Next he exhorts all the saints to be strong and loving as they go about their work (16:13–14), and he calls for the Corinthians to be subordinate to all who, like Stephanas, work together (συνεργέω, 16:16—from the same word family again) and toil (16:15–18). The chapter closes with a series of greetings (16:19–24). (CC)

16:1-4 One excellent avenue for the Corinthians to abound “in the work of the Lord” (15:58) presented itself in a project dear to the apostle’s heart, the collection for “the poor among the saints in Jerusalem” (Rom 15:26). In his second epistle to Corinth he will devote considerable space to the final preparations for the collection (2 Corinthians 8–9), encouraging his hearers to develop a self-sufficient attitude so that they “may abound in every good work” (2 Cor 9:8; see also 2 Cor 8:7). The collection was a broad interchurch project, involving the churches of Galatia and Macedonia in addition to Corinth and the other churches of Achaia. Thus Paul was able to stimulate a friendly rivalry, holding up the example of their sister churches to urge the Corinthians to a greater effort (2 Cor 8:1–6; 9:2–4). (CC)

The Corinthians had asked Paul for further clarification “concerning the collection” (1 Cor 16:1). They were already familiar with the project but needed more information on how to proceed. The money was “for the saints” (16:1). From 16:3 and other texts we know that Paul did not mean their fellow Christians in general, but those members of the mother church in Jerusalem who had become impoverished (cf. Rom 15:25–28). Why they had fallen into poverty we can only speculate. All we know for certain is that the church had a large number of widows (Acts 6:1–6) and had suffered from famine (Acts 11:27–30). Paul believed the newly founded daughter churches in Macedonia, Achaia, and Galatia, who had reaped spiritual benefits from the mother church in Jerusalem, were indebted to minister to their mother in her physical needs (Rom 15:27). He had already directed the Galatian churches (1 Cor 16:1), the fruit of his first missionary journey (Acts 13–14), to pave the way. Now the Corinthians were to follow. (CC)

Paul now outlines the procedure (1 Cor 16:2). Every Sunday (“every first day after the Sabbath,” the literal meaning of 16:2), each member of the congregation, no matter how poor, should store up (literally “treasure up”) in his home an amount in keeping with how well he had fared during the week. Paul wanted the Corinthians to give only what they could spare (cf. Acts 11:29). As he assured them in his second epistle, “I do not mean that there should be relief for others and pressure on you, but it is a question of a fair balance between your present abundance and their need” (2 Cor 8:13–14 NRSV). Paul may also be suggesting that by this unselfish action the Corinthians will be storing up treasures in heaven

(cf. Mt 6:19–21, where θησαυρίζω, “store up treasure” [the same verb used in 1 Cor 16:2], and the noun θησαυρός, “treasure,” are used). Hays draws out the implications for churches today: “It is also significant that Paul does not target his appeal to the wealthy members of the community, who might be expected to provide the necessary patronage for this sort of enterprise; instead, he calls upon all to participate in accordance with their ability.” (CC)

The small amount each person would set aside each Sunday would soon accumulate to a significant sum, so that when Paul arrived in Corinth, together with delegates from Macedonia, he would find the gift ready and waiting. This would spare Paul and his companions, not to mention the Corinthians, any embarrassment. Thus Paul would be spared the need to exert personal pressure by making a last-minute appeal, and the Corinthians would be spared having to rustle up in haste whatever they could find (2 Cor 9:3–5). (CC)

In 1 Cor 16:3 Paul refers to his impending visit (as he did in 4:18–21), the details of which he will spell out in the next paragraph (16:5–9). When he comes to Corinth, he will supply the congregation’s chosen representatives with letters of introduction to the church in Jerusalem (16:3). Such references were a regular part of business practice in the ancient world. The plural “letters” may suggest that each member of the delegation carried a personal recommendation from Paul.¹⁴ Paul is careful to entrust the collection and conveying of this gracious gift to the church’s representatives. At no time would he touch any of it with his own hands. Thus no one could accuse Paul of defrauding the church (2 Cor 12:17–18). Moreover, it was fitting that the Gentiles’ gift be carried to the mother church by Gentiles. (CC)

Paul is still undecided whether or not to accompany the delegation. It depends on whether it would be “worthy” or “fitting” (ἄξιος, 1 Cor 16:4). It is unlikely this means that Paul is waiting to see whether the gift is substantial enough to make it worthwhile for him to go along. More likely he is concerned to find out if the Corinthians think it “proper” for him to join them in conveying the gift. After all, it is their gift, not his (16:3). He does not want to participate without their consent (cf. Philemon 14). Fee’s concluding comments on 1 Cor 16:1–4 are worth repeating:

Although this is not a primary text in the NT on Christian giving, ... something can still be learned here. ... What is significant here is the very matter-of-fact way the issue is taken up. On a weekly basis they should set money aside, as the Lord has prospered them. No pressure, no gimmicks, no emotion. A need had to be met, and the Corinthians were capable of playing a role in it. In a day of highly visible campaigns for money on every side, there is something to be said for the more consistent, purposeful approach outlined here. (CC)

16:1 *Now about.* Again an answer to one of the questions of the Corinthians (cf. 7:1; 8:1; 12:1). (CSB)

collection for the saints. Money for the poverty-stricken Christians in Jerusalem (Rm 15:26). (TLSB)

directed. Gk *diatasso*, “to order or command,” exemplifies Paul’s authority as an apostle. “The distribution of alms by the Corinthians ... was a holy work, a sacrifice and battle of Christ against the devil, who labors so that nothing may be done to praise God. To demean such works (the confession of doctrine, sufferings, works of love, suppression of the flesh) would be to demean the outward rule of Christ’s kingdom among people” (Ap V 71–72). (TLSB)

God’s people. His people at Jerusalem (cf. v. 3; Ro 15:26). (CSB)

churches of Galatia. The fact that the Galatian and Macedonian churches (2Co 8:1; 9:1–4) are involved, along with the Corinthians, indicates that the collection of this offering was quite widespread.

The Jerusalem saints may have become poverty-stricken because of the famine recorded in Ac 11:28 (c. A.D. 44 or 46), or because of the persecution of Jerusalem Christians (cf. Ac 8:1). (CSB)

16:2 *On the first day of every week, each one of you should put aside.* Every Sunday each person was to bring what he had set aside for the Lord's work—an amount proportionate to his income. Since it was to be brought on Sunday, the new day for worship (cf. Ac 20:7; Rev 1:10), probably it was collected at the worship service, not at home. Justin Martyr indicates (in his *Apology*, 1.67–68) that in his time (c. A.D. 150) offerings were brought to the church on Sundays. (CSB)

Lit, “according to one [day] from the Sabbath.” Whereas the Jews worshiped on Saturday, Christians began to worship on Sunday. Based on one's income, a member “treasured up” an offering each week at home. Approved representatives later received and distributed these offerings. (TLSB)

16:3 For proper financial accountability and responsibility these approved men would act as auditors and guardians of the funds the Corinthians gave (cf. 2Co 8:16–21). (CSB)

by letter. Paul will give letters of introduction to the Corinthian representatives, which they could present to the leaders in Jerusalem (a common business practice). (TLSB)

16:4 *If it seems advisable for me to go also.* Possibly to take care of important missionary business, or to be there to explain about the gift when it arrives. (CSB)

Paul could join in presenting the gift. (TLSB)

16:1–4 Compassion leads the early Christian congregations to treasure up and distribute support for fellow Christians and ministries in need. When we learn of brothers and sisters in need, God's Word leads us to demonstrate the bond of fellowship created by the Gospel. Christ treasured us by freely giving His life for us, and He grants us generous hearts. • Generous Lord, as You cause us to prosper spiritually and financially, lead us also to treasure our brothers and sisters with all compassion. Amen. (TLSB)

Plans for Travel

5 I will visit you after passing through Macedonia, for I intend to pass through Macedonia, 6 and perhaps I will stay with you or even spend the winter, so that you may help me on my journey, wherever I go. 7 For I do not want to see you now just in passing. I hope to spend some time with you, if the Lord permits. 8 But I will stay in Ephesus until Pentecost, 9 for a wide door for effective work has opened to me, and there are many adversaries. 10 When Timothy comes, see that you put him at ease among you, for he is doing the work of the Lord, as I am. 11 So let no one despise him. Help him on his way in peace, that he may return to me, for I am expecting him with the brothers.

16:5–9 Paul's discussion of the arrangements for the collection led him to touch on his travel plans (1 Cor 16:3–4), which he now proceeds to spell out in more detail (16:5–9). First he explains that he will not be able to visit the Corinthians immediately. When he does, it will be by the land route through Macedonia, the route he had followed on his second missionary journey. He hopes to set out soon after Pentecost (i.e., late spring) and spend summer and possibly the early part of fall strengthening and encouraging the Macedonian churches (Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea). After writing this epistle, his anxiety for the Corinthian church prompted him to formulate a plan to visit the Corinthians first, and then visit them again after his time in Macedonia. Thus they would have “a double favor” (2 Cor 1:15–16). Upon more mature consideration, however, Paul reverted to his original plan outlined here. He traveled from Ephesus to Macedonia, and then spent three months in Corinth (Acts 20:2–3). (CC)

Paul assures the Corinthians that he does not want to make merely a fleeting visit; he hopes to stay with them a significant amount of time (1 Cor 16:7). Envisioning that he would arrive in the fall, he had thoughts of even spending the whole winter with them, since further travel during that season would normally be out of the question. That would depend, of course, on the Lord's will (16:7; cf. Acts 18:21; James 4:15). Paul knew he was not the master of his fate. Indeed, he had experienced how the Lord could block his plans and send him in another direction (Acts 16:6–7). But if the Lord permitted him to spend some time with the Corinthians, this would give them ample opportunity to provide him with the necessary food, money, and traveling companions for the next stage of his missionary work (1 Cor 16:6). Having earlier refused to accept any assistance from the Corinthians, in order to make it crystal clear that his Gospel came free of charge (1 Corinthians 9), Paul now graciously offers them an opportunity to share in his ministry. (CC)

He was still not sure where the Lord would lead him after his stay in Corinth (cf. 16:4). It is likely that places such as Illyricum and Spain were at the back of his mind. But soon after writing this epistle he “resolved in the Spirit” that his next destination should be Jerusalem (Acts 19:21). (CC)

In the meantime, however, he informs the Corinthians (1 Cor 16:8) that he will continue his ministry in Ephesus until Pentecost (May/June). His three-year ministry in that prominent city had resulted in many residents of Asia, both Jews and Greeks, hearing the Word of the Lord (Acts 19:10; 20:21, 31). The Word had grown mightily and prevailed (Acts 19:20). The Lord had indeed opened for him a “great and effective” door (1 Cor 16:9) for the Gospel, in accordance with the prayers of Paul and his fellow believers (2 Cor 2:12; Col 4:3). Whereas human efforts per se are totally ineffective in bringing people to faith, the Lord provides open doors and opens hearts and eyes as he wills. (CC)

The other side of the coin is that wherever there are great opportunities for the Gospel, there great opposition arises (1 Cor 16:9). Paul had experienced this from the beginning in Ephesus (Acts 19:9). Whether he is writing before or after the great riot in the Ephesian theater (Acts 19:23–40) we do not know, but the incident gives us an impression of the volatile situation. By the time he wrote 1 Corinthians his opponents' attacks had become so severe that he testified, “I fought wild beasts in Ephesus” (1 Cor 15:32; cf. 2 Cor 1:8). The apostle's experience parallels that of his Lord, whose fruitful ministry was carried on in the face of many opponents, and the common experience of other faithful pastors. But Paul did not allow his opponents to frighten him (Phil 1:28); he was determined “not to fly, but to stay on.” As Hays comments: “[Paul's] description of his plans here shows that Christians may sometimes be called upon to stand and testify in dangerous circumstances, and that the place of greatest risk may also be the place of greatest opportunity for proclaiming the gospel.” (CC)

16:5 *After passing through Macedonia.* After leaving Ephesus (v. 8), where he was when he wrote 1 Corinthians, Paul planned to go up to Macedonia, no doubt to visit the Philippians and others in northern Greece, and then to Corinth. He had originally planned to go to Corinth first and then to Macedonia but thought it best to change his plans (see 2Co 1:12–2:4). The itinerary of 16:5 agrees with that of Ac 19:1–20:6. (CSB)

16:6 *even spend the winter.* Probably the three-month stay in Greece mentioned in Ac 20:3. (CSB)

When travel was difficult. (TLSB)

help me on my journey. With supplies and equipment, and certainly with prayers and goodwill. However, Paul had indicated earlier in the letter (9:7–12) that he did not want to be a financial burden to them. (CSB)

Paul's mission work received financial support. (TLSB)

16:8 *until Pentecost.* The 50th day (Pentecost means “50” after Passover, when the Jews celebrated the Feast of Firstfruits (Lev 23:10–16)—late spring. (CSB)

16:9 *there are many adversaries.* Probably a reference to the pagan craftsmen who made the silver shrines of Artemis and to the general populace whom they had stirred up (Ac 19:23–34). (CSB)

Although great opportunities for spreading the Gospel existed, Paul's work offended Jewish people because he welcomed uncircumcised Gentiles into the churches. The Gentiles opposed Paul because his preaching undermined idolatry. (TLSB)

16:10 *If Timothy comes.* In Ac 19:22 Paul sends Timothy (and Erastus) into Macedonia, after which Timothy was to go on to Corinth (1Co 4:17). (CSB)

Timothy bore Paul's apostolic authority. (TLSB)

Earlier Paul had informed the Corinthians that he had sent Timothy to them. Timothy, his “beloved and faithful child in the Lord,” would remind them of Paul's ways in Christ Jesus (1 Cor 4:17). The younger man now making his way to Corinth was engaged in the great work of the Lord (16:10) no less than the apostle who was so actively engaged in Ephesus (16:9; cf. 15:58). If the Corinthians were to create difficulties for Timothy, they would be obstructing the work of the Lord. Thus they should welcome him as they would welcome Paul, their father in the faith (4:14–15). (CC)

Paul had grounds for concern on Timothy's behalf. Timothy seems to have suffered from a timid disposition, which caused stomach trouble and other ailments (1 Tim 5:21–23; 2 Tim 1:6–8; 2:1, 3, 15; 4:1–2). Moreover, he was a young man, perhaps still in his twenties. Several years later Paul still felt the need to urge him, “Let no one despise your youth” (1 Tim 4:12). There were a number of arrogant people in Corinth (1 Cor 3:1–3; 4:18; 5:2) who were probably not above treating a young and timid pastor with contempt. Especially was this likely to occur if some had taken offense at the apostle's latest epistle and were inclined to take out their resentment on his representative. Paul attempts to forestall such attacks with his word of warning, “Let no one despise him” (16:11). (CC)

Rather, the Corinthians should give him a warm welcome, which would allay his fears, and send him on his way back to Paul in peace (16:11). This serves as a gentle reminder that Timothy will be reporting back to Paul. Whether Paul comes to the Corinthians “with a stick, or in love and a spirit of gentleness” (4:21) will depend to no small extent on how they treat Timothy. (CC)

According to one possible reading of 16:11, Paul could be expecting Timothy to be accompanied by some brothers. From Acts 19:22 we learn that Timothy had set out for Macedonia and Corinth with Erastus, but no other brother is mentioned there. Paul may have sent some unnamed Christians from Ephesus along with Timothy and Erastus, or he may have been expecting Timothy and Erastus to return with brothers from the Corinthian church. But another way of understanding the phrase “with the brothers” (1 Cor 16:11) is to connect it with Paul, the subject of the sentence, as in the Jerusalem Bible: “the brothers and I are waiting for him.” That connection would reinforce to the Corinthians that Timothy is a representative of the larger church. If they mistreat Timothy, he will report this not only to Paul, but also to these other brothers, who would lend their weight to appropriate corrective measures. (CC)

put him at ease. Timothy seems to have been somewhat timid (1Ti 4:12; 2Ti 1:7), and Paul wants the Corinthians to treat him kindly. (CSB)

16:11 *despise*. Questions of authority and disagreements persisted in the Church at Corinth. (TLSB)

brothers. Possibly including Erastus (cf. Ac 19:22), who was a believer from Corinth and “the city’s director of public works.” (CSB)

16:5–11 Paul clears the way for future work and for the work of his colleague Timothy. Effective ministry today also depends on clear planning and authority so that congregations may support the work of the Lord. That work is vital because faith, life, and salvation come only through the Lord’s Word. • Dear Jesus, prosper the work of the Lord among us so that Your life-giving Gospel is not despised through sinful disagreement or stubbornness. Lead us to respect and support those who preach the Gospel faithfully. Amen. (TLSB)

Final Instructions

12 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. 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.

16:12 *Now concerning ... Apollos*. The Corinthians had asked Paul about Apollos (cf. the similar words, “now about,” in 7:1; 8:1; 12:1; 16:1) and his coming to see them. (CSB)

Paul comes now to the sixth and final topic raised in the Corinthians’ prior letter to him: the question of when they could expect a visit from Apollos. Paul speaks of his coworker affectionately as “the brother.” There is no jealousy or rivalry between the two men. If there were, Paul would not have been so keen that Apollos join “the brothers” (16:12) Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus (16:17) when they returned to Corinth, for that would give the eloquent Alexandrian a chance to increase his personal following. But Paul considered Apollos to be a faithful servant of God who had “watered” the Corinthian congregation which Paul had “planted” (3:6), and Paul stated that he and Apollos were “one” (3:8). (CC)

Apollos, however, had insisted that he would not go to Corinth at the present time; “it was not at all [his] will” (16:12). Note that the verb ἦν (“it was”) is in the imperfect (past) tense, which probably indicates that Apollos was no longer with Paul at the time of writing. If Apollos were still in Ephesus, presumably Paul would have added a greeting from Apollos in 16:19–24. (CC)

We can only guess why Apollos was unwilling to visit Corinth at that time. He may have been too busy with new tasks in another area, or he may have feared that the faction in Corinth which claimed him as their leader (1:12; 3:4–6, 22; 4:6) would make too much of him at the expense of the church’s unity. Whatever the reasons, he had assured Paul that he would visit the congregation as soon as he found a suitable opportunity. (CC)

16:13–14 Paul likely addressed the Letter to congregational leaders, who were men; they needed to display manly virtues. (TLSB)

With no particle to make a connection to his words about Timothy and Apollos (1 Cor 16:10–12), Paul moves swiftly to conclude the epistle. Almost in the fashion of a general, he issues five crisp commands

to his hearers. His words do not come totally out of the blue, however; they echo and reinforce 15:58: “Be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord.” (CC)

The first four commands use imagery from warfare (cf. 1 Macc 12:27; Eph 6:10–17) to urge the Corinthians to be Christian soldiers who stand in constant battle readiness and conduct themselves in a courageous manner on the field. Like ancient Israel in the wilderness (e.g., Num 1:3), the church is an army on the march. The final command (1 Cor 16:14) reminds the Corinthians that an army cannot be divided against itself; it must be cohesive and united in its campaign, which in the case of the church is driven by God’s “love” (16:14) in Christ Jesus. (CC)

Paul’s first admonition is to “be watchful” and alert (16:13). The verb γρηγορέω, “to watch” (16:13), is the antonym of being asleep or drunk (1 Thess 5:6–10; Ignatius to Polycarp 1:3). It includes watching for the day of the Lord, lest that day come upon the believer unawares (Mk 13:33–37), and watching against the devil, false teachers, and various temptations. Prayerful watching should characterize the Christian life. (CC)

Second, the Christian should continue to “stand [στήκω] in the faith” (1 Cor 16:13). Earlier Paul had reminded the Corinthians that they were standing (perfect of ἵστημι) in the Gospel (15:1), but now he urges them not to become slack and weary in the struggle. The antonym would be to fall from grace by abandoning the faith. “Let him who thinks he is standing [perfect of ἵστημι] watch that he doesn’t fall” (10:12). Instead of slouching, the Christian soldier should “stand” his ground (ἵστημι, Eph 6:11, 13–14; cf. Rev 14:1), refusing to give an inch as he stands in the Lord (στήκω, 1 Thess 3:8) and contends for the Gospel (Jude 3). (CC)

Then Paul urges the Corinthians: “Be manly, be strong” (1 Cor 16:13). These two imperatives are paired together in the admonitions in LXX Ps 26:14 (MT/ET 27:14) and LXX Ps 30:25 (MT 31:25; ET 31:24). But such admonitions were also common in the exhortations that preceded Israel’s holy wars. In Hebrew the imperatives of צַדִּיק and גִּבּוֹר, usually rendered “be strong” and “be courageous,” are paired in exhortations for Joshua and Israel not to fear the Canaanites, but to fight and conquer the Promised Land, confident that the Lord will fight with and for them and fulfill his covenant promises. God’s people are not to let their hearts shake “as the trees of the forest shake before the wind” (Is 7:2). Rather, with firm confidence in the Lord, they are to acquit themselves in a manly fashion on the field of battle, letting the Lord strengthen them in the inner man (Eph 3:16). (CC)

Finally, with the fifth imperative of 1 Cor 16:13–14, Paul urges the Corinthians, “Let all you do *be* in love” (16:14). His call for manliness and courage should not be taken to mean they were at liberty to be aggressive and abusive toward others. No army can function if the troops are constantly fighting among themselves (cf. Gal 5:15). From the beginning of the epistle, his major concern has been to promote Christian love and unity (κοινωνία, 1 Cor 1:9) in the face of divisive, arrogant, and inconsiderate tendencies within the congregation. This culminated in his great chapter in praise of Christian love (13:1–13). Everything God’s people do in the work of the Lord should bear the imprint of that love. (CC)

16:14 *in love*. The virtue of strength does not conflict with virtue of love. (TLSB)

16:15-18 This paragraph serves as a letter of recommendation for Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus, who would bear 1 Corinthians back to Corinth. Paul urges the congregation to continue to hold these men in high honor for their service. (CC)

The household of Stephanas had been “the firstfruits of Achaia” (1 Cor 16:15), just as Epainetus’ household had become the firstfruits of Asia (Rom 16:5). In 1 Cor 15:20 Christ was named as the “firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.” The term is eschatological, pointing forward to the great

harvest that is to come on the Last Day. According to Acts 17:34 the Athenians Dionysius the Areopagite, a woman called Damaris, and “others with them” had come to faith before anyone in Corinth. Stephanas and his family may have been among those “others,” if they were living in Athens at the time (see the commentary on 1:16 for a discussion of that possibility). Whether he was resident in Athens or elsewhere, he must have been the first convert in Achaia to bring his entire household to Baptism (1 Cor 1:16). The whole family, then, together with the servants, set themselves to the service of the saints. (CC)

The expression “set themselves” means that they ordered (τάσσω, 16:15) their lives and routines to function as a unit which served that one great purpose. Paul does not spell out what their service to the saints consisted of, but undoubtedly it included above all the ministry of the Gospel together with constant acts of Christian love and helpfulness. It may not be far off the mark to see here the ideal picture of a pastor’s household, ordering itself so that it can best provide for “the work of ministry.” (CC)

Since the members of Stephanas’ household have ordered their lives to serve the saints, it is fitting that the saints in Corinth give proper recognition to their service and subordinate themselves to them and to anyone else who works and toils in the Christian ministry (16:16). Paul’s words reflect his earlier letter to the Thessalonians: “Now we ask you, brothers, to recognize those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work” (1 Thess 5:12–13; cf. 1 Tim 5:17; Heb 13:17). (CC)

Paul adds his personal expression of joy that Stephanas and his two companions, Fortunatus and Achaicus, had been able to spend some time with him (1 Cor 16:17). Fortunatus (“fortunate one”) and Achaicus (“man for Achaia”) were probably slaves or freedmen who were attached to Stephanas’ household and had received spiritual formation under his tutelage. Now this delegation had brought him “a little bit of Corinth,”¹¹ filling Paul’s need to enjoy again the love, warm fellowship, and encouragement of the saints among whom he had spent eighteen months of his ministry. (CC)

Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus had performed this service to the apostle in rich measure, for their meek and humble ministrations had refreshed his spirit (16:18) in a way that reflected the ministry of their Master (Mt 11:28–29; cf. 2 Cor 7:13). But this would be no surprise to the Corinthians, who had often experienced how their own spirits were refreshed by these men. Accordingly Paul appeals to the congregation to give such men the recognition they deserved. (CC)

16:15 *household of Stephanas.* Evidently the Corinthians had little respect for this household that Paul had baptized (1:16). They were among the first converts in Achaia (Greece), along with the few individuals in Athens who had believed a short time earlier (Ac 17:34). (CSB)

devoted themselves. The Gk terms have the same root, emphasizing order and authority in service. (TLSB)

service. The whole household of Stephanas was serving. (CSB)

fellow worker and laborer. Paul has in mind a brotherhood in ministry, in which each worker respects the other. (TLSB)

6:17 Probably the ones who had brought to the apostle the letter from the Corinthians referred to in 7:1. Their coming “supplied what was lacking” from the Corinthians, i.e., the affection of these three brothers supplied the affection Paul desired from the whole Corinthian church. (CSB)

your absence. A delegation of leaders from Corinth was to have traveled to Ephesus to see Paul but did not. (TLSB)

16:18 *refreshed my spirit as well as yours.* Perhaps through their willingness to come to get Paul’s advice and to bring it back to them. At least a new relationship between Paul and the Corinthians was in the making. (CSB)

Lit, “to cause to rest.” (TLSB)

16:12–18 Paul urges the leaders at Corinth to recognize the service, calling, and authority of each other and to see themselves as part of a larger team. No matter how or where you serve the Lord, you, too, are part of a larger team. Respect your fellow workers by listening to them and coordinating efforts with them. Our Savior’s strong, firm love and leadership preserves the unity of His dear Church, for which He gave His life. • Dear Jesus, grant me patience with my colleagues, and direct us ever by Your pure Word so that we may stand firm together by Your grace alone. Amen. (TLSB)

Greetings

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. 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.

16:19-24 Paul closes his letter with a series of greetings (1 Cor 16:19–21), followed by a solemn “anathema” on anyone who does not love the Lord (16:22a), a prayer for the Lord’s return (16:22b), and a gracious benediction on the congregation (16:23–24). (CC)

16:19 *churches of Asia.* The Roman province (presently in western Turkey) in which Ephesus and the surrounding cities were located (cf. Ac 19:10). During Paul’s long ministry in Ephesus all in the province of Asia heard the word. The churches of Colosse, Laodicea and Hierapolis (cf. Col 4:13–16; Rev 1:11), which were located on the border of the province of Asia, may be included in the greetings, along with the other churches of Rev 2–3. (CSB)

Asia Minor, modern Turkey. Ephesus was the largest city of the province. (TLSB)

Greetings. The greetings serve as another gentle reminder that the Corinthians are not an isolated group free to go their own way; they belong to the wider communion of the church universal, which extends to them its warm affection and solidarity. (CC)

The first greetings come from “the churches of Asia” (16:19). The word “Asia” does not have its modern connotation of the vast continent by that name. Rather, it denotes the Roman province of Asia, which comprised the western third of the peninsula now known as Asia Minor or Turkey. Ephesus was the province’s largest and most important city during the Roman period, with a population estimated at 200,000 to 250,000. During Paul’s three-year residence in Ephesus⁶ the Word of the Lord had radiated throughout the province (Acts 19:10)—to Colossae, Laodicea, Hierapolis (Col 4:13), and no doubt other centers. All the churches now send their greetings to their older sister in Corinth. (CC)

Especially warm greetings came from Aquila and Prisca and the church which met in their home. Aquila and Prisca had been Paul’s hosts and fellow tentmakers in Corinth (Acts 18:2–3). This outstanding Jewish-Christian couple had come to Corinth from Rome, after the emperor Claudius had ordered the expulsion of all Jews from Rome. Upon the conclusion of Paul’s eighteen-month ministry in Corinth, they had accompanied him as he sailed for Syria. Paul left them in Ephesus (Acts 18:18–19), where they again

played a prominent role in the young church and opened their home for worship. Later we find them back again in Rome (Rom 16:3–5; 2 Tim 4:19), with the church gathering in their home. Apparently they were a wealthy couple, with a home large enough to accommodate a house-church gathering and with the means to sustain their frequent moves from city to city. They were a capable couple, able to give Apollos the more accurate private instruction he needed in “the Way” (Acts 18:26). It has been suggested that Prisca (or Priscilla, as Luke calls her) was a particularly outstanding person, for her name is given first on four of the six occasions when the couple is mentioned. (CC)

Since Paul has already passed on comprehensive greetings from the Asian churches, the additional greetings from “all the brothers” (1 Cor 16:20) at first sight may seem redundant. But most likely it means “all the brothers of the church in Ephesus,” that is, not only Aquila and Prisca and their circle, but every Christian in the city. (CC)

Just as their fellow Christians in Asia have lovingly expressed their warm affection for the Corinthians, so the Corinthians in turn should show that same affection to one another, putting behind them the frictions of the past and greeting each other “with a holy kiss” (16:20). The practice of God’s people greeting each other with such a kiss has its roots in the OT, where family members and friends would greet each other or say farewell with a kiss.^b A kiss could also be a sign of reconciliation (Gen 33:4). The NT indicates that a similar practice existed at least among some Jews and Christians.^c Paul calls this expression of Christian love a “holy kiss” to distinguish it from an erotic or romantic kiss and perhaps also from the treacherous kiss of a Judas. (CC)

If it may be assumed that Paul’s letters were intended for reading in worship, then the holy kiss which he recommended may have followed immediately as part of the congregation’s response to the reading. A century later Justin Martyr testified that the greeting of peace followed the prayers in the common liturgy in Rome.¹⁵ No doubt Paul’s words had great influence in shaping the development of this and other liturgical practices. The theory that 16:20–24 contains traces of early Christian Eucharistic worship apparently goes back to R. Seeberg. H. Lietzmann has painted a colorful picture of the liturgical setting as he conceives it:

We are at Corinth at a meeting of the congregation. A letter from the Apostle is being read out and draws near its end. ... And then rings out the liturgical phrase, “Greet one another with the holy kiss. All the saints kiss you also in Christian communion”—and the Corinthians kiss one another—“The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Ghost be with you all!”—“And with thy spirit” answers the church. The letter is ended and the Lord’s Supper begins. (CC)

Dix adds his own comment: “This over- strains the evidence a good deal, but it probably represents something like the truth.” Lacking any direct information about the details of the worship service in Corinth, we should show proper caution in any attempt to reconstruct the exact order of events. However, it is reasonable to suppose that 1 Corinthians was intended to be read at a congregational gathering, and that the gathering would have concluded with the kiss of peace and Holy Communion. (CC)

Fee takes exception to what he calls the tenuous practice of arguing “backward” from the presence of the kiss in the Eucharist of second-century Rome, or from the use of *maranatha* in the eucharistic prayer of Didache 10:6, to the premise that Paul shaped the conclusion of his epistle to make it serve as a transition to a eucharistic celebration. He cites favorably an article by van Unnik, who warns against a “ ‘pan-liturgism’ ” which “finds evidence of later liturgies behind every conceivable passage in Paul’s letters.” (CC)

In response, the following may be observed. (1) Fee is right to warn against outrunning the evidence. (2) He is right in insisting that 16:20–24 be viewed primarily as an epistolary rather than a liturgical form. (3) We should bear in mind, however, the role of the apostle himself in instituting the liturgical forms practiced in Corinth (11:2, 23), and his constant concern throughout the epistle that the Corinthians' worship remain pure. It would therefore not be surprising if his closing words echoed formulas from worship which were so familiar to his hearers and to himself. (4) There do seem to be some remarkable parallels between 16:20–24 and elements of later liturgies. Exegetical and liturgical scholarship will no doubt continue to find it fruitful to explore the relationship between NT texts and early liturgies. (CC)

The final greeting (16:21) and the final pithy sentences (16:22–24) are penned by Paul himself with his own hand. Not only did this gesture add a personal touch at the end of a letter that probably was mostly in his secretary's handwriting (presumably Sosthenes, 1:1), but it also certified that the letter genuinely came from Paul. In 2 Thess 3:17 the apostle explains, "I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. This is the mark in every letter of mine; it is the way I write." (CC)

Aquila and Priscilla. They had helped Paul found the church at Corinth (Ac 18:1–4). (CSB)

the church that meets at their house. Aquila and Priscilla had left Corinth with Paul and had gone to Ephesus (Ac 18:18–19). Evidently they were still there, and a church was meeting at their house; it now sends greetings. House churches were common in this early period (cf. Ro 16:3–5; Phm 2). (CSB)

heart greeting in the Lord. Enthusiastically as fellow believers. (CSB)

16:20 *All the brothers.* Ephesians. (TLSB)

holy kiss. The kiss of mutual respect and love in the Lord was evidently the public practice of early Christians—from a practice that was customary in the ancient East. Such a practice may have been used in the first-century A.D. synagogue—men kissing men, and women kissing women—and it would have been natural for the practice to have been continued in the early Jewish-Gentile churches. (CSB)

Not romantic, but in greeting. It was probably a kiss on the cheek, as in many Near Eastern cultures today. (TLSB)

16:21 *greeting with my own hand.* Paul now signs this letter, as was his habit (see Col 4:18; Phm 19), a mark of the authenticity of the letter (2Th 3:17). Someone else had been penning the letter for him up to this point (cf. Ro 16:22). (CSB)

16:22 Paul includes both a curse and a blessing in his closing, perhaps in response to the curses pronounced by some at Corinth. (TLSB)

accursed. May this person experience God's displeasure and wrath, since he has declared himself an unbeliever (Jn 3:36). This is not a curse based on things God has created (e.g., heaven and earth), an oath that Jesus forbids. Rather, it is a curse based on God as witness to the unbeliever's essential lack of love and obedience to God (see also Gal 1:8–9). (CSB)

Gk *anathema.* (TLSB)

In issuing this strong injunction in the form of an anathema (1 Cor 16:22a), Paul seems to be casting his eye back over all the sorry divisions and disobedience to the Lord that have been the burden of his epistle. The Corinthians' love of human power and wisdom rather than the power and wisdom of the Crucified One (chapters 1–4), their love of worldly pleasures—the case of the incestuous man (chapter 5), the

wrangling over property by means of lawsuits (6:1–8), the resorting to prostitutes (6:9–20), the reclining and eating in heathen temples (chapters 8 and 10)—and their desire for spectacular gifts (chapters 12 and 14), all amounted to human pride and love of self rather than love for the Lord. There were some in the congregation who lacked “the obedience of faith” (Rom 1:5). (CC)

Paul may well have had in mind the words of the psalmist (Ps 31:23–24):

Love the Lord, all his saints!

The Lord preserves the faithful, he repays fully him who acts proudly. Be strong and let your heart be courageous, all you who hope in the Lord. (CC)

Paul insists that anyone who does not love the Lord should be “anathema” (1 Cor 16:22a; cf. Rom 9:3; Gal 1:8–9). Thus the apostle places anyone who persists in his proud, puffed up, and loveless attitudes into the hands of the living God, that he may be subject to the divine curse. “He [the Lord] repays fully him who acts proudly” (Ps 31:23). The anathema, followed as it is by the “marana tha” (1 Cor 16:22), clearly has this eschatological ring. In addition, it may also imply that Paul would direct that the congregation carry out a preliminary judgment by excommunicating such a loveless person, as in the case of the incestuous man (5:1–13). He should be regarded as one who is “cut off from Christ” (Rom 9:3) and excluded from the Christian fellowship (cf. Rom 16:17–20; 1 Cor 12:3; Gal 1:8–9). What this means for the church’s practice Paul spells out in 2 Thess 3:14–15: “If anyone refuses to obey what we say in this letter, note that man, and have nothing to do with him, that he may be ashamed. Do not look on him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother.” This would also mean that he could not receive the Lord’s Supper until such time as he might repent and be restored to the church’s fellowship. (CC)

In connection with 1 Cor 16:22, Hays targets one of the “shibboleths” of late twentieth-century churches, the doctrine of “inclusivism”: “The Christian community as a community of love is not infinitely inclusive: those who reject Jesus are not and cannot be a part of it.” He continues: “Those who destroy the community are, virtually by definition, not loving the Lord. Thus, the curse of 16:22 is a thinly veiled threat against those Corinthians who have turned spirituality into a competitive sport, a way of aggrandizing themselves rather than adoring their Lord and maker.” (CC)

our Lord come! See NIV text note; an expression used by the early church as a cry that the second coming of Christ may soon take place. (CSB)

On the other hand, those who love the Lord and rest their hope in him may be courageous and strong, having nothing to fear from his second coming (Ps 31:23–24). Those who love the Lord love and long for his appearing (ἐπιφάνεια, 2 Tim 4:8). Thus Paul now cries to the Lord from his heart (cf. Ps 31:22), using the language of his heart, his mother tongue, Aramaic: “Marana tha! Our Lord, come!” (1 Cor 16:22b). “The prayer addresses the risen Lord and implores him to return—thus bringing about the consummation that Paul sketched in 15:20–28.” (CC)

Like other Aramaic or Jewish words that became common coin in the early church (“amen,” “hallelujah,” “hosanna”), “maranatha” seems to have been a beloved expression because of the way it gave voice to the Christian expectation and hope. Thus Paul sounds again, and in a particularly emphatic and memorable way, the eschatological note with which the epistle began (“as you eagerly await the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ,” 1:7) and which echoes and reechoes through this final chapter: the collection as eschatological sign (16:1–4); the imperative to “be watchful” (16:13); Stephanas as Achaia’s “firstfruits” (16:15). This intense Christian expectation of the end is intended to help the over-excited Corinthians sober up as they wait and watch (16:13). They do not have everything “already” (4:8); the best is yet to come. Meanwhile, every celebration of the Lord’s Supper takes place in eager anticipation of that day, as the church proclaims the Lord’s death “until he comes” (11:26). (CC)

Paul's prayer ("marana tha," 16:22b) expresses his personal longing and the longing of all the saints. Their prayer is voiced again in the final chapter of the Bible, where John depicts the Spirit and the whole church, the bride of the Lamb, saying, "Come!" (Rev 22:17), and John himself, in response to Jesus' assurance "Surely I am coming soon," adds his firm "Amen, come, Lord Jesus" (Rev 22:20). Thus the whole church fixes all her hope on the grace which is to be brought to her at the revelation of Jesus Christ (1 Pet 1:13). (CC)

16:23 The apostle's usual benediction (see Gal 6:18; Eph 6:24; Php 4:23); a longer Trinitarian benediction is found in 2Co 13:14. (CSB)

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16:24 Although he has been severe with the Corinthians, Paul wants them to know that he loves them as believers in Christ Jesus. (CSB)

16:19–24 Paul's bittersweet conclusion illustrates his passion for the Gospel and for the congregation. Likewise, the Lord calls us to passionate service and love. Jesus, too, forcefully denounced those who abused God's Word (Mt 23:1–36); yet He poured out His love for all sinners, so that all might know His grace. • Dear Jesus, fill me with sincere passion for sharing the Gospel with those who have not yet heard of or believed in Your grace. Amen. (TLSB)