

Some Practicals of Ministry – 1 Corinthians 16:1-12

Introduction – Following his lofty discourse on the hope we have in the resurrection of the body and eternal life in the New Creation, Paul applies his exhortation to be “*always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain*” (15:58). This is where we see that being *heavenly minded* in the right way makes us more *earthly good*. Paul ends his letter with a variety of practical ministry directives. We learn what a life devoted to Christ looks like in practical ways, raising money for mercy ministry, and making plans for ongoing discipleship.

A Church Gathering and a Collection (vv1-4) – We can’t avoid it, and we shouldn’t. Ministry takes money. Ministering to those in need takes money. There was a great need in Jerusalem among the poor there (Acts 6:1, Gal 2:9-10). Paul has been rallying the churches in Galatia, Macedonia, and Achaia all to contribute (v1, Rom 15:26-27) which would help connect the Gentile churches to the Jewish congregations in Judea. This is not the tithe, but an offering and an opportunity to give as they have prospered (v2, 2 Cor 9:7-9). Paul wants to make sure that this offering is not made under the duress of deadlines, but rather is deliberate, planned, and is seen as connected to thanksgiving for all the Lord has blessed them with. In vv3-4, we see two important principles being worked out. First, generous giving is best delivered face to face. Second, setting up accountability structures is faithful. Paul and representatives from Corinth would take the offering to Jerusalem. And all of this shows faith in Christ working itself out in the love of Christ (James 2:14-16). This is the kind of cheerful giving the Lord loves to bless (2 Cor 9:6-7).

In order to make this happen, Paul encourages them to “*lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper...*” (v2). And he says to do this “*on the first day of the week.*” This is one of several hints throughout the New Testament of a gathering and a worship service on Sunday. Christians gathered on the first day of the week, the Lord’s Day when Jesus rose from the dead (Rev 1:10). This first day of the New Creation set the tone for the rest of the week. It is a day to be renewed in covenant with God and with one another, a day of reverent worship and joy (Heb 12:28), of singing and feasting, of fellowship, rest, and generosity.

Mission Plans...if the Lord Permits (vv5-12) – Paul is probably writing from Ephesus (v8) which was the base of his third missionary journey (Acts 18:19-21), staying there for two to three years (Acts 19:10, 20:31). He had plans to revisit Macedonia (think Philippi, Thessalonica...) and is thinking about dropping down to Corinth then, but if he does, he doesn’t want to just pass through, but to stay with them awhile (vv5-7). But even an apostle must submit his plans to the Lord’s sovereignty and so he says, “*if the Lord wills.*” Later, we see that his plans were changed (2 Cor 1:15-18, 2 Cor 8-9), as we see happened throughout the book of Acts. How often are your plans changed and are you quick to note that the Lord made those changes? How quick are you to trust and even thank God for the changes, gladly submitting to His good sovereignty? James warns us of being arrogant about our life as though God were not sovereign over such things as calendars and plans (James 4:13-16). Paul wanted Apollos to come to Corinth (v12), but Apollos was unwilling and Paul (the apostle) had to be ok with that too. And if Paul didn’t come, Timothy would be coming and Paul admonished Corinth “*let no one despise him*” (v11). Timothy may have been in his 20s, but regardless he was not the apostle Paul. But Paul expected them to receive Timothy and to “*send him on his journey*” (which means to provide for his next leg) so that he could return to Ephesus where Paul was.

The interplay of persons, of churches, of cities, and of nations, is how the gospel spreads in so many ways. Our relationships in the CREC leads to supporting fledgling churches in Eastern Europe (and now possibly in Pakistan!), as well as to other missions groups (Training Leaders International and Joost Nixon, or Special Delivery in Woodinville). Plans and schedules often change “*unexpectedly*” and so all of this is done “*if the Lord wills.*”

A Great and Effective Door (vv8-9) – Jesus told his disciples to look and see the ripe harvest before them (John 4:34-35). He saw a multitude in need of a shepherd and told them to pray that God would raise up workers for that harvest (Matt 9:35-38). Pray that God would give you eyes to see the ministry that is right before you. There are so many needs and opportunities; there is a need for so many workers. And look! Here we are; here *you* are (Isaiah 6:8).

Paul sees these many needs and opportunities. But he also looks for the open doors, the special opportunities ripe for harvest, and he senses one in Ephesus (vv8-9). There was a great and effective door AND there were many adversaries. The fact that there are spiritual obstacles (in this case) only seems to make more clear to Paul that a great opportunity was before him (otherwise, why would the enemy be deploying resources to stop him?). Later, Paul would see a riot developing and see it as an opportunity to preach (Acts 19:23-41). And later while imprisoned, chained to a guard, Paul would see this as an opportunity with a “captive” audience (Phil 1:12-14).

It often never seems to go as planned. Someone once said that the kingdom of God advances from triumph to triumph, with all the triumphs cleverly disguised as disasters. Even this letter, filled with corrections to false teachings and sinful attitudes from a church in near-disaster turns out to be an inspired epistle of the New Testament, discipling the church centuries later.

Dave Hatcher – September 21, 2019