1 Corinthians 16

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 08 November 2026

Preacher: Reuben Hunter

[0:00] Well, we're closing out 1 Corinthians this evening, as Paul has said.! So we do turn that up, page 962 in the Black Church Bibles. I realize it's been a while, and I'm sorry about that.

Schedule was the way it was, and we come to conclude what has been a lot longer series in 1 Corinthians than I'd initially planned when we started out. But as you heard it read, it's a strange way, I think, to end a letter that has at times really hit the theological heights. It feels very mundane. You could say a summary of what he says here in chapter 16 is, put aside some money for other churches. I'd like to come to you, but I'm busy preaching here in Ephesus. I'll send some other preachers your way in due course.
Show respect to the original core team in the church there, and remember those guys in Asia? Do you remember them? They say hello, and keep going, won't you? Stay Christian while I'm gone.
It feels like a bit of a sort of anticlimactic way to end a letter that has at times been incredibly forceful, incredibly rich, incredibly theologically kind of complicated and detailed.
[1:19] It's very mundane. But what I want us to see is that this isn't just stuck on at the end with a few blessed thoughts of a letter that Paul has written. What we get here are Paul's priorities for a church that needs to get back on track with the Lord Jesus. They need to get back to ordering their life together around Christ and around His Word, rather than continuing with all the problems that we've seen that they have.

Really, from the very first chapter, we've been addressing problem after problem after problem in the life of the church. And as we come to the end with a high and exalted chapter 15, we get Paul's priorities for how they should live.
And as I've said all the way through this series, here we are in Ealing, we're not where the Corinthians were. By God's grace, that isn't true of us. We're not marked by the same behavior and attitudes that Paul was writing to address so directly in the Corinthian church.
But we would be naive if we thought we were immune from the same temptations. There is, in Corinth, cultural opposition coming from the outside, and there is that same old sinful heart at play inside the life of the church.
And that means that danger for us is always lurking. You think, why do we have the epistles in the New Testament? These are letters that are written to churches that have been preserved by the Holy Spirit down through the centuries so that we would receive the instruction that was directed toward them, but is addressing issues that are going to be relevant for every Christian in every generation, for every church in every generation.
[3:03] The danger that we see corrected or addressed in Corinth, those are dangers that are dangerous for every Christian in every generation. So we need to be aware.

And it's also important to say, if you turn back a page and remind yourself of what it says in chapter 15, verse 2, what he says in chapter 16 is how you do, 15, verse 2.
So Paul described that glorious future in the resurrection. We've just heard about it in the catechism. The bodily resurrection of those who are joined to Christ by faith. Do you see in 15, verse 2? And by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you, unless you believed in vain.
That bodily resurrection, that glorious future, that recalibrates everything in our present, is only for those who hold fast to the word that he preached. It is only for those of us who hold fast to the end, the apostolic gospel that we have received from Paul.
The gospel that Christians believe will save us. It will, if we hold fast to that word and stay the course. And in this closing chapter, Paul explains what that holding fast will involve for this church community.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

[4:16] Three commitments I want us to see that will enable the church to endure. Three commitments. Here's the first. He says, I want you to be marked by generosity in gospel partnership.

Generosity in gospel partnership, verses 1 to 4. Verse 1, Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I directed the churches of Galatia, so you also are to do. 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.
And when I arrive, I will send those whom you accredit by letter to carry your gift to Jerusalem. If it seems advisable that I should go also, they will accompany me. Paul starts with the weekly collection.
This is standard practice. He says in the Galatian churches, that when you gather for worship on the Lord's day, set aside a proportion of what the Lord has given you. Verse 2, According to your prosperity, you could say.
When he says, as he may prosper, technically it should say, according to your prosperity. So he's talking about a percentage of your income according to what you have. And he says, do that to enable the church to function and the gospel to advance.
[5:25] In this case, it is to support the church in Jerusalem that obviously had financial needs. And then he says, with verse 3, the due accountability, that would mean he's above reproach and that the money is handled appropriately.

Paul plans to take that money to them when he next visits the church. Now this is an obvious reminder to us that as individuals, we should be giving to the Lord's work. It is a reminder that this should be deliberate and it should be regular.
It's not something we do once and then forget about. It's something that we should be constantly thinking about in the life of our discipleship. It is a part of what it means to follow Christ. Earlier in this letter, chapter 9, you remember chapter 9?
Nope, neither do I. Chapter 9, Paul reminded the Corinthians that just as in the Old Testament, the worship and the temple life of the people was enabled through the tithe.
That is the giving of 10%, the first fruits of what God had given them, 10% of that given back to the Lord. And the 10% was a way of saying, the first 10% was a way of saying, the whole 100% belonged to the Lord.
[6:31] But this is how you marked it out. That was to be given back in order to fund the ministry and the priests and the temple. And he says here, he said back in chapter 9, that ministry today is funded, chapter 9, verse 14, in the same way.

Supporting ministry starts with our tithing. But the principle of generosity more widely is something that Paul wants the Corinthians to grasp here. We've seen how self-obsessed they were, haven't we, as we've gone through my inner circle, my opinions, my pleasures, my gifts.
It's all about me. And there's a rat race going on in the life of the church. Here's the thing. Selfish people aren't generous people. You know that. But when Christ takes hold of your life, when he takes hold of your life, your selfishness begins to evaporate and you start to live, rather than grasping, you live with open hands.
Paul makes this expectation explicit in the other letter to this church. In 2 Corinthians chapter 8, Paul holds up the Lord Jesus as the model, and specifically the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus as the model for our generosity.
When it comes to the work of the gospel, training ministers, planting churches, establishing them, supporting them, as they grow, we are to be sacrificial. And Paul says, that is modeled after the example of Christ.
[8:02] As it was for him, and the way that he lived so sacrificially, and gave himself up for us, so it should be with us. And he goes on to say in 2 Corinthians chapter 9, that this shouldn't be something that we do with gritted teeth.

We shouldn't say, I take the name of Christ, and he gave everything he had on the cross for me, therefore I suppose I should be sacrificial as well.
No. It should be cheerful. We get to give to God. 2 Corinthians 9 verse 7. And therefore, God loves a cheerful giver.
Now, if you're a member of this church, you have committed to this. We heard it this morning, as we had new members come into the life of the church, one of the promises we make, do you promise

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

to be regular in attendance, and to support this church prayerfully, financially, and practically in your care for others?
We're to be generous in our gospel partnership. And as a church, we do support a number of individuals who are involved in different ministries, but most of our support is directed through our presbytery to church planting.
[9:16] Our mission support, you could say, our commitment financially to gospel partnership is mostly directed through our presbytery to see churches planted across this country.

However, over the last few months, as you'll have heard, if you're at the AGM, and if you come to the prayer meeting, it's been mentioned there, we've stepped things up a bit recently. We've given significant gifts to our church in Leeds to help them try and buy a building.
Owning your own building is a pressing need, not just in our denomination, but for the sake of the church in our nation more widely.
And we're in our denomination one of the better resource churches, and because of that, we want to be able to help. We have churches in our denomination that the Lord is blessing, and they're growing, and as they're growing, they're outgrowing the little spaces that they started out in, and they need places to meet.
But in many cases, they can't find places to meet because landlords either don't like what they believe, or maybe the landlord doesn't care what they believe, but they don't want the grief from others who don't like what the church believes.
[10:31] What happens in a local community, a church starts up, starts preaching the gospel, teaching the Bible faithfully, local people don't like that. They start an online campaign or something like that, and the landlord thinks, I don't want the hassle, and so he puts them out.

Church plants can often lose their venue at short notice. If they own their own building, that wouldn't be a problem. It doesn't matter what other people think. Now, across this congregation, we have resources to help enable this kind of generous partnership.
And don't forget our training fund. There's another opportunity. Fewer men than ever are going into ministry, and we want to address that. We're committed to the fact that raising up pastors isn't the work of seminaries alone.
It is churches that make pastors. So you can give to that to enable us to identify and recruit and equip gifted men for the work of the gospel in future generations. What we're doing when we do that, we're playing our part in strengthening the IPC as a whole.
So Paul says, a church that perseveres is committed to generosity in gospel partnership. Here's the second commitment. He said, I want you to be marked, secondly, by humility with faithful ministers.
[11:47] Humility with faithful ministers. That's verses 5 to 12. Now, remember back near the start of the letter, it's one of the things that people often talk about when they, if they're anyway familiar with 1 Corinthians, and that is how the Corinthians fought over their preachers.

You remember, I follow Paul. I follow Apollos. Some preferred Paul. Others followed Peter. The reasons they did this weren't explained, but you can guess.
Some people say, oh, I follow Paul. He's more faithful. Or I follow Paul. He's the OG. He was the church planter. He was the first guy here. I was with him in those days. They say, well, I follow Apollos.
He's way more engaging. He's way more interesting to listen to. He's more relevant, actually, to our cultural moment, that kind of chat. You can imagine it. But Paul rebuked them for this.
And he raises the same point, actually, here with these closing words. He tells them his travel plans, verses 5 to 9, to explain why he isn't coming to them yet.
[12:48] And then look at verse 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. 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.

Now, concerning our brother Apollos, 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. Corinthians may have wanted Paul to return, but he says he can't leave Ephesus because the Lord has opened too many opportunities, and his blessing is preaching there too much to leave.
He's in a fruitful season of ministry, and he doesn't want to turn his back on that in order to go back here. Others may have wanted Apollos to come. Old pastor Apollos, he was a favorite, you remember, with that group in the church, because he stayed after Paul left.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

But he's not up for it. It's not at all his will to come now. I reckon if I was Apollos, and I'd heard what was going on in Corinth, it wouldn't have been my will to go and try and clean that up either.
But Timothy, Timothy is coming. That's right. The younger, not the apostle Timothy. And Paul here endorses his ministry.
[14:07] Put him at ease. Make him feel welcome and at home among you. Don't despise him. Don't look down on his ministry because he's not the great apostle.

Paul clears the way for Timothy to be well received. He's saying here, Timothy's a faithful gospel minister. He's preaching the same gospel that I preached among you. So love and care for him and take what he says seriously.
Look after him well and make sure when his time comes to move on that you do what you can to help him. Week by week, the life of any church, the thing that we need more than anything else is to sit under the faithful preaching of God's Word.
As the Bible is read, proclaimed, and applied to your life, God is speaking to you in ways that he doesn't do in any other context.
Now, obviously, he does speak in other contexts, but he hasn't promised to do that in the way that he has when the church gathers on the Lord's Day for worship. He has promised to be present with us by his Holy Spirit now on the Lord's Day in ways that he hasn't at other points in the week.
[15:21] So what I think we're supposed to take from this is that we are to humble ourselves to hear his voice whatever, whoever, the messenger. As long as they're faithful to what the Bible says, it doesn't matter who that preacher is.

God has put them there, and God is the one who is speaking. I think that's important for us to hear in a church like ours, because there is a bond that is created over time between a preacher and the congregation, and that is a great thing.
The trust that is built means that you can more easily hear the voice of God when they preach, and you'll usually hear a rebuke, or you'll respond to an encouragement more easily, because there's a bond that has been created and a trust that is there.
Your minister has been here for a long time, and that bond is very clear. It's very striking to me coming in that I can see the bond that exists between Paul and the congregation here, and because of that, you're easily edified.
I realize I could sound the wrong way. You know, you're easily, he could say any old thing and you'd be edified. I don't mean it like that. What I mean is, because that trust exists, the ministry here is fruitful.
[16:44] You receive it from him well. But the other side of that blessing is that they become the standard, and so you find it hard to hear other preachers. I'm not talking about me, by the way. I'm not talking about me, but I'm talking about those like Timothy who are younger men.

They are up here because they're doing the same work that Paul is doing. Both Pauls, actually. Paul Levy, and the Apostle Paul because it's the same apostolic gospel. And you should receive them well.
You should put them at their ease. Don't give them reason to be intimidated. And don't despise them. Hear them humbly, knowing that God is speaking through them.
One practical way you can do this is to pray for them. When you know that they're slated to preach, pray for their preparation, pray for the sermon itself, and then encourage them. Tell them what you appreciate about the sermon.
Thank them for their labors. They aren't as good as they will be, but that's okay. Hear their faithful ministry with humility because God is the one who is speaking. Generosity and gospel partnership.
[17:52] Humility with faithful ministers. And then the third commitment. Love in all things. in order to make it kind of feel like a sermon.

Generosity and gospel partnership. Humility with faithful ministers. Charity in all things. Love in all things. That's verses 13 to the end through to 24. Paul is saying here this love should be expressed in two directions.
And unsurprisingly, it's just as Jesus summarized the greatest commandment. Those directions, those two directions. Love towards God and towards other people. Verse 13 is actually a summary of what it looks like to love God.
Be watchful. Stand firm in the faith. Act like men. Be strong. Someone who does those things isn't blown around by the cultural winds, but loves God more than anything else.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

We've seen throughout the letter that the Corinthians failed to do this. They've begun to cave in to false teaching. They've tolerated behavior in their midst that has no place in a church.
[19:00] And that's because they've become more enamored with the culture than they are with God and His Word. The things that we read about the sin and the compromise and the going off after idolatry and things like that in the life of the Corinthian church, all of that has come because the pressure from outside has caused them to cave in.

They haven't been watchful. They haven't stood firm. They haven't acted like men and they haven't been strong. And it didn't simply make them ineffective. A church that is like the world has ceased to be what it is designed to be and is actually impotent.
There is no benefit to anybody if the church is like the world. The church does the world very badly and it's no benefit to any of us.
But that is not all it is. It's not just that they're ineffective. It is also when we do this it is an offense against God. God is not pleased when churches follow the lead of the culture.
So, we need to watch out. We need to watch out rather than roll over. We need to stand firm in the faith with a masculine strength. Paul isn't saying that the women of the church should start behaving like men.
[20:15] Obviously, he's not saying that. He's saying that the church corporate should have a masculine courage when it comes to standing against the prevailing cultural pressures. We do that as an expression of our love for God.

We do that because we treasure Him. We worship Him. We love Him more than we love ourselves or the culture around us.
The church of Jesus Christ needs to be hard-headed and soft-hearted. Tough when it comes to cultural opposition and compromise. Tender when it comes to our relationships together and caring for the broken.
That's what masculinity involves. Masculinity is hard-headed and tender-hearted. Hard-headed in the face of opposition and tender-hearted to those that we protect and we care for.
And it is actually in the life of the church hard truths that create soft hearts. Hard truths create soft hearts because those truths are what humble us before God and turn us towards others in service.
[21:30] Preaching should be unsettling for that reason. It shouldn't be offensive in and of itself, but it should unsettle us for that reason so that our hearts are softened before God and towards others.

Now there is a danger that we could get this the other way around. We're soft-headed and hard-hearted. We don't love and uphold truth. The Bible doesn't drive how the church functions and what we put in its place doesn't therefore have the power to transform our hearts.
It's the problem in so many ways with bad theology. It doesn't do the work on our hearts that actually bears fruit in our relationships together.
There's no transforming power. Love for God demands that we calibrate what we see as true and good and beautiful according to His Word. No other standard. You can't love God and at the same time be well thought of by a culture that hates what He has to say.
That is why Paul's language here has a military tone. We are in a battle. You might wish that you weren't, but what you wish doesn't change reality. Too many of us in the contemporary church have played pretend for too long.
[22:47] We've lived like it's peacetime when the enemy of our souls has been waging war and we haven't been watchful. We haven't been watchful over the poison of godless worldviews, whether that's feminism or socialism or secularism or any other kind of ism.

We haven't been watchful over the influence of those worldviews in our lives and in our families' lives. We haven't been watchful about what our children are taught at school or the effect of social media on all of us.
We haven't been watchful in our marriages or in the way we form our vision of the good life. If I was to ask you, what is the life of flourishing? What is the good life that you are longing for in the depths of your heart?
How much would that really be marked by comfort and luxury over obedience to the Lord Jesus? We haven't thought we were at war, so why would we need to be watchful? And then because of this, we haven't stood firm in our faith.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

If you aren't aware of the enemy, you're overrun sometimes without even realizing it and then you do realize, but it's too late. Standing firm in the faith starts with worship on the Lord's Day.
[24:00] Stick a nail in that. That's the mark of your week that never shifts. It starts there, but that's the floor, that's not the ceiling. Standing firm in the faith means that you acknowledge that Jesus is in charge of absolutely everything.

Every single aspect of your life, Jesus is in charge and that is acknowledged in the way that you approach absolutely everything that you do.
love for God means that He is honored in all your decisions and Paul is making clear here that this will require diligence, courage, and strength. Love for God is at odds with being respected and accepted by the cool shamers in our culture and we need to settle that and we need to change the way we think.
If we're pursuing respectability in our culture, we will compromise with Christ. Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong.
Letting all that you do be done in love starts with love for God, but that will overflow into a love for others, especially in the church in the body of Christ and Paul points to particular people in the Corinthian church here who are worthy of honor and respect.
[25:20] The household of Stephanas, they were known for their devotion to the church and Paul tells the Corinthians to submit to their leadership, verse 16, to give them the recognition that they deserve, verse 18.

They refreshed my spirit as well as yours, gave recognition to such people. This church contains excellent people who like Stephanas and Fortunatus and Achaicus provide us with examples to follow and who deserve our respect.
We have people among us in our membership here who have done exactly what the apostle has called this church to. They've been watchful over many years.
They've stood firm in the faith for a long time. They've acted like men and they are strong. They deserve our respect. I can say, as one who sits among them, your elders are faithful men here. Faithful men who I can tell you are devoted to the service of the saints and they count their calling a privilege. They are humble men and all that they do is done in love. It's not just leaders who we're to love.
[26:29] Paul's exhortation is also to the whole church. Let all that you do be done in love, verse 14. And then again in 20, greet one another with a holy kiss. It's two ways of saying the same thing. And that's more than just serve one another in the life of the church.

Help where there are needs, good as that is. What Paul is doing here is calling the Corinthians to live up to their profession, live up to them saying that they are followers of the Lord Jesus.
Paul often finishes his letters with this kind of language. You see it in Romans, you see it in Thessalonians, but it would have had extra bite, wouldn't it, in this letter because of all the disunity that they have known. Greet one another with a holy kiss.
The kiss isn't the point, it's a cultural greeting, I think, like we see in some European countries. The greeting is the point, the welcome, the acceptance, the affection, the encouragement, the unity. This church that has been so divided is to cultivate unity again. A unity that's won for them through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. And therefore, it's a unity that transcends any earthly differences that they would have.
[27:41] You know, apart from Christ, let all that you do be done in love, is simply wishful thinking. Selfishness will always raise its head and relationships will crack under the strain.

But because we have received, verse 23, the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, we're not just able now to love God and to stand up for His truth. We are able to extend grace to our brothers and sisters.
The unity that we enjoy and it is a remarkable unity that we enjoy as a church together here, but it can never be taken for granted.
So keep working at it. I mentioned our membership vows earlier in respect of giving, but here's also vow number six. Do you commit yourself to building and maintaining healthy relationships within this church, treating your fellow believers as your brothers and sisters in Christ?
And there's no little caveat at the end there, treating them as your brothers and sisters in Christ if they do what you want, if they always treat you well.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

[28:52] They never cut across what you want. They're never angular or difficult. It doesn't say that. But it's not just wishful thinking because we can do this in the power of the gospel.

unity among ourselves requires truth and love and we can only practice these to the degree that we know the truth and love that we have received in Christ. When you know the truth and love that you have received in Christ, you can keep your word when it's costly to do so.
You can forgive wrongs. You can cover offenses. You can say, ah, don't matter. You have the resources to do that in Christ. You do.
That's one of the things that I think is most attractive in the life of the church when the gospel that we profess has so gripped our hearts that we know the sacrifice that Christ made for us, we're liberated to sacrifice for others.
When we have experienced in the depths of our hearts the love that we have been shown in Christ, we're set free from all of the selfishness and lovelessness that our sinful nature would have us express.
[30:10] We're freed from it all to go and love others. We can be wronged because Christ was wronged to a much greater degree for us. Letting all that you do be done in love.

Charity in all things is hard. Generosity, humility, humility, those things that we're called to, they're hard for sure because they are the way of the cross.
But Christ equips us. He equips us so as we close out this series in the book of 1 Corinthians, the exhortation is Christ equips us so go to Him.
Go to Christ and stay with Him and stay close to Him, very, very, very close to Him. And as we do that, we'll be equipped to love others as we have been loved and live out these commitments, these powerful and transformative commitments in our life together.
Let's pray.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host