

1 Corinthians 16

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Date: 29 October 2023

[0:00] Take your Bibles, going to 1 Corinthians 16. 1 Corinthians 16. We're wrapping up the book of 1 Corinthians this morning. We've taken some time. We've been in it now for a number of weeks. And it's been challenging.

It's been encouraging. It's been confronting. And it's really, it's been heartening to read the Word of God as Paul is writing to the believers at Corinth. He opens up his letter by referring to the saints. He will end his letter by discussing the saints. He is reminding the believers of who they are positionally. Now we've looked at that over and over again because their practice was not with their position.

So we need to be reminded of who we are positionally so that we can get in line our practice. Because too often we find that because of the temptations and the schemes of the enemy of our souls, he causes us to practice things which are contrary to the position we have in Christ. As Paul is writing to the church at Corinth, he has rebuked them. He has corrected them. He has challenged them. And he has encouraged them. And he's done a number of these things in order that they may be the church.

[1:04] Right? He's not calling them as individuals. He's not calling them to Christ because they are already saints. So the challenge is to the church. That the church would be what it was called to be and that it would operate in society.

He placed it in as the church that he had called it to be. It is an encouragement and a challenge that resonates through the ages. It is not something that was confined to that first century A.D.

It is something that transcends time that God has called his people to be the church in the age in which he has planted them. He has called his people to be the clear representatives of his kingdom in the time that he has ordained for them to live.

Paul reminds us in the book of Acts. And I know this is a long introduction before we even read the text. But it's very, really applicable. Paul reminds us in the book of Acts. Acts chapter 16 when he's speaking to the men of Athens.

That God ordains the seasons. He ordains the times. And he ordains even the place where we live. That God orchestrates these things. And he does it for his purposes.

[2:08] Not just for us. You say, well, I decided to do this and I decided to do that. And I thought I would go here and I believed I would do that. Well, we're also told in the Old Testament that man plans his ways but the Lord directs his steps.

You may have a great plan but God has a grand direction. And where we are is because this is where God has designed that we would be. So in that we are called to be the church he's called us to be. And Paul wraps up 1 Corinthians with what we would quite often call his closing remarks in the 16th chapter.

A very distinguishing thing of the authorship of Paul. Normally, when Paul writes his letters, he introduces himself. He introduces why he's writing to the people. And then he gets right into it. In a number of Paul's letters, he introduces himself. He introduces the reason for his writing. He brings theology or doctrine into practice. And then he spends the second half of the book talking about practicing that theology.

And then he ends the book with the conclusion, kind of an encouragement. He wants to send you on your way in a good way, right? He gives you a true doxology. And he sends you out with closing remarks.

[3:12] And he often does this kind of as a conclusion of everything that he has already discussed. This morning, we will see in the 16th chapter, the distinguishing marks of a true Christian community.

What it looks like to be a true Christian community. And he does it in light of the things that were going on at Corinth. But these are things which have application to us today as well. So if you are

physically able and desire to do this, I'm asking if you'll join with me as we stand together and we read the 16th chapter of 1 Corinthians.

We will read the entire chapter and then we will pray. Paul, writing here, says, Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I directed the churches of Galatia, so do you also.

On the first day of every week, each one of you is to put aside and save, as he may prosper, so that no collections may be made when I come. When I arrive, whomever you may approve, I will send them with letters to carry your gifts to Jerusalem.

And if it is fitting for me to go also, they will go with me. But I will come to you after I go through Macedonia, for I am going through Macedonia, and perhaps I will stay with you or even spend the winter, so that you may send me on my way wherever I may go.

[4 : 22] For I do not wish to see you now just in passing, for I hope to remain with you for some time, if the Lord permits. But I will remain at Ephesus until Pentecost, for a wide door for effective service has opened to me, and there are many adversaries.

Now if Timothy comes, see that he is with you without cause to be afraid, for he is doing the Lord's work as I also am. So let no one despise him, but send him on his way in peace, so that he may come to me, for I expect him with the brethren.

But concerning Apollos, our brother, I encouraged him greatly to come to you with the brethren, and it was not at all his desire to come now, but he will come when he has opportunity. Be on the alert. Stand firm in the faith. Act like men. Be strong. Let all that you do be done in love. Now I urge you, brethren, you know the household of Stephanas, that they were the firstfruits of Acacia, and that they have devoted themselves to ministry to the saints, that you also be in subjection to such men and to everyone who helps in the work and labors.

I rejoice over the coming of Stephanas and Fortunatus and Acacias, because they have supplied what was lacking on your part. For they refreshed my spirit and yours.

[5 : 39] Therefore acknowledge such men. The churches of Asia greet you. Aquila and Prissa greet you heartily in the Lord, with the church that is in their house.

All the brethren greet you. Greet one another with a holy kiss. The greeting is with my own hand, Paul. If anyone does not love the Lord, he is to be accursed. Maranatha.

The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you. My love be with you all in Christ Jesus. Amen. Let's pray. Lord, we thank you for this day. Lord, we're so thankful for the opportunity which we have come to lift up our voice in song.

We thank you for the opportunity which you give us to fellowship with brothers and sisters in Christ. But Lord, we cannot praise you enough for the opportunity which we have to open together with one another, the word of God, to read from it, to hear it, and to see it.

Lord, what a grand privilege it is. And Lord, we pray that by the power and presence of your spirit now that you would speak to our hearts and minds. You would let the words of scripture become realities within us. Lord, that those realities would direct how we live for your glory and honor.

[6 : 43] And we ask it all in Jesus' name. Amen. You may be seated. We see here as Paul is writing to the church at Corinth, he gives them a number of attributes which will distinguish them as a Christian community in which they live.

It would set them apart. Now, this is not something new to the letter because one of the rebukes and rebuttals that Paul brought to the church at Corinth was that they looked very much like the community in which they lived.

They began to bring in the community attributes. They began to bring in the community behavior. They began to bring society into the church. And the church had become more of a thermometer than a thermostat.

If you remember the illustration, a thermometer just tells you what the temperature is. The thermostat dictates the temperature. Some of you just a minute ago said, thank you, Lord, because the air cut on.

Some of you said, oh, no, Lord, cut it off because the air just cut on. But the whole reason it did that was because the thermostat in the back of the room is dictating the temperature of the room. Too many believers today are thermostats.

[7 : 43] That is, they are a reflection of what is going on in society. I mean, they're thermometers. They're just displaying everything that everybody else is doing rather than being thermostats, that which dictates how society should look.

And here Paul is writing to this church and saying that you are going to look different. Something is going to set you apart. Something is going to be radically different about you. And you ought to be noticeable in the community in which you live.

And here are the things which distinguish you, which set you apart, and which give you the opportunity to proclaim the gospel. Mark Dever, who pastors Capitol Hill Baptist Church in Washington, D.C.

I wrote a great, there's a number of books by this title. He started what's called Nine Marks Ministry. Nine Marks was the first book that came out. Nine Marks was the Nine Marks of the Healthy Church. It's a great book, by the way.

I read it many, many, many years ago. If you ever want to see what a church should look like, I don't usually encourage other books. But it's a great book. There are usually, there are a number of them that Nine Marks, they are things which set true churches apart.

[8 : 42] And we begin to see here, as Paul lists, I'll go ahead and tell you, five distinguishing marks in this chapter, which should set the believers in Corinth apart from everyone else around them.

And he does it really as closing remarks because it's always good to be reminded of what we should look like in light of where we live. Again, let's go back. Historically, Corinth is a very populated city.

It's a very prosperous city. And it's also a very promiscuous city. There's a lot that's wrong there. If you remember, it's a port city in which the sailors decided it was better, rather than go around the Isthmus of Corinth, to drag their ships, essentially to dry dock their ships, and to drag them across the small land of Corinth.

And therefore, their ships were being drug on all the rollers and everything of that nature to go across the land. And you had a captivated crowd there. It was a really big port, and it was a really big trade town.

And because of that, Rome utilized it. Rome really saw favor with it. And it was used for a number of reasons. But there were a lot of false temples there. There were a lot of false practice.

[9 : 49] There were a lot of things which were really, it was atrocious, just to say it in any other word. It looked a lot like our present-day America. I hate to say that, but when you study history, that's exactly what it looks like.

And whatever wanted to happen, happened there. Society as a whole was dark. But in the midst of that dark society, there was a church. And this church was called to shine the light of Christ in that society.

It is amazing when you study history, and you see the impact of what takes place when the people of God begin to look like the people of God in the community in which they have been placed.

I mean, it's astounding. It's astounding when you look and you see when God has his people, because Scripture shows us one thing, and it shows us one thing really well. God always has his man, right?

Always. No matter how dark the world gets, no matter how radical people behave, no matter how wrong people do, God always has his man.

[10 : 55] Cain kills Abel, but then Eve gives birth to Seth, right? The world goes desperately wicked, and man is doing everything that it sets his heart to, and God looks for a man, and he finds Noah, right?

And then there's Noah that's there, who is a preacher of righteousness for 120 years, and then God wants to put his love and grace and mercy on display, so he calls Abram out of the land of the Ur of the Chaldeans.

Over and over and over again, we can always find that God has his man. The oldest book in your Bible is the book of Job, and it predates much of what you read historically that takes place in the pages that go before.

But even in the days of Job, God had his man so much so that he asked Satan, what about my man, Job, right? God always has his man.

No matter how bad the world looks, no matter how dark society is, he always has his man. Now, I don't mean this men and women, so stay with me. Don't just get wrong on me there. But the question is, is will those people be God's people at that time?

[12 : 02] Because when they begin to behave like it, and when they begin to live like it, and when the book begins to dictate their life, society is radically changed.

It's astounding. When you see how desperately dark the world can get when man does his own desires, you don't have to go very far back in society, but when you see that, and then you see this glimmer of light called the church rise up and begin to behave like the church, and they're distinguished from everything else, and you see that the whole society in which they live is turned upside down.

We've seen it in our own land. We see it in the land across the world that there is something that distinguishes the church, and when that church behaves as they should in the society in which they have placed, then God uses them in a mighty, mighty way.

Here, Paul encourages the church at Corinth with five very clear distinctives that should set them apart. The first one is utilized resources. Now, this is where we think, well, preachers are getting a little too close to home, right?

This is where preachers begin to step on toes, and I've always said, I think that I have yet, in 17 years of ministry, I have never preached a series on giving. I've never.

[13 : 19] I've never preached a series. I've never led any kind of monetary drive. I've never been one who begged and pleaded for money. I've never been one, but I've always said that when we get the heart right, the wallet follows.

But I've also said that when the Bible says it, we can't run away from it. So Paul very clearly says it here because the church at Corinth asked a question. It says, now concerning the collection for the saints. It's an offering.

Evidently, this is something that when the church at Corinth sent the letters to the three men, which Paul lists later, they had a question about the collection. So he is responding now. He's done this a couple of times in the letters, and the church wanted to know, what should we do about an offering? How should we do this offering? And he says, now concerning the collection for the saints, let's put ourselves in context and see what's going on. When you open up the pages of the book of Acts, you find in the pages of the book of Acts that there is a prophet who comes to the city of Antioch. And in Antioch, the Christians are first called Christians. In Antioch, there's a man named Paul who's being set apart for missionary service there. This prophet comes to the church in Antioch and has a word from God that a great famine was going to come upon the land.

[14 : 25] And the famine would come upon the land and bring great harm upon everyone, but it would really do great harm to the believers which were in Jerusalem. So as part of Paul's missionary travels, he encouraged the saints outside of Jewish territory to collect an offering for the saints and send it back to Jerusalem.

It was to serve a twofold purpose. We just need to understand. This one had a purpose. First of all, Jerusalem was hit harder than anyone else during that famine. Believers in Jerusalem were really decimated because they had disowned the rest of their family by leaving Judaism and coming to faith in Christ.

Therefore, they had separated themselves. And their, gets this, their commitment to Christ cost them something. Most of the time, it would cost them economically because people would no longer do business with them.

Yet, they were not afraid to make that commitment to Christ. And Paul would tell the believers in other lands where they were free to make such commitments, Gentile territories, and not suffer hardships, say, well, it is our responsibility to take them because we owe our faith to those founders of the faith.

It was there that the church started. It was there. I mean, unless Paul was mistaken, and we understand this, that that is where Christ came from. Christ was a Jewish individual when he took on flesh as a Jewish man.

[15 : 40] And he reminds them of their indebtedness to the church at Jerusalem. But he also was using this as a bridge to bring peace and reconciliation because believers at Jerusalem sometimes have problems with believers outside of Jerusalem.

And he said, you know, if we want to unite this, then maybe we could love one another. And it's good to say you love one another. The book of James says, that's all well and good. If you say, I love you, I love you, I love you. He said, but unless you do something because of that love, it really means nothing.

So Paul said, let me show you how you can do something about it. Let's take a collection. Let's send it to them. By the way, it's this collection that Paul's bringing back and it is there when he gives it to the church at Jerusalem that he ends up getting drug out of the temple.

This will cost Paul his life at the end. This will be the reason he's sent to Rome to be beheaded. This will be the reason he stands in prison. These are the very things which lead to that. Yet Paul knew that and thought it was so important.

So he says now, concerning the collection of the saints, he wants to talk to them about their resources and how they can utilize them because the greatest resource, you have two great resources at your disposal.

[16:41] You have time and you have money. Your time is a valuable asset which you allow me to take part of every week. I can never give it back to you.

I'm so thankful that you give me that time. But what we invest our time in really shows how we want to utilize our resources. And let's just be honest, we are a very prosperous people.

You say, well, I don't feel like prosperous. I don't feel like I'm prosperous either. Most of the time, I mean, because of our society in which we live, I get it. But we are in light of humanity and in light of history, we are very prosperous people.

And therefore we are very responsible people. We carry responsibilities. And the word of God tells us, now concerning the collection of the saints, as I directed the church at Galatia, so do you also. So we see here, this first principle, when it comes to these resources, this is not a focused, centralized location aspect.

This is a universal issue. He says, what they're doing over here, I want you to do over there as well. So no matter where you're at, at this time in the early church, this principle applies to you.

[17:45] Everybody doing the same thing. Paul said it this way. We want to be focused on one purpose. We want to be a focused church, not a scattered.

So he said, what they're doing over there, I want you to do here as well. And I want you to do it this way. And then he goes on the first day of the week. Now stop right here. Here's another principle. Their gift was to be in conjunction and a part of their worship.

Giving is an act of worship. This is why the Bible tells us that God loves a cheerful giver. As a matter of fact, the word of God declares to us that if we give begrudgingly, it would be better not to give.

The word of God encourages us that we ought to be worshipful givers. Because it says on the first day of the week, when you come together, the first day of the week was something that was so new to the church because the Jews worshiped and rested on the seventh day, right?

The last day of the week. The first day was to be a day of work. This was a day of work. Some historians will tell you that was payday. So he would say on your payday. But we also know that it was worship day.

[18:49] Most of the time, they did not have church in the morning. We're in a great time in society. They would have to have church in the evening because they had to go to work that day. That was a work day. They said when you come together as a part of your worship, one thing I want you to do as a part of your worship is I want you to utilize your resources and I want you to bring and I want you to give an offering.

And he says that each one of you is to put aside. Now all of a sudden, we went from this corporate worship to the individual responsibility. Each one of you. Therefore, we see this principle that God does not exclude any from this opportunity.

And it is an opportunity. What a grand opportunity it is. He says I want each one of you to set aside as he may prosper. So the giving is not legalistic.

You say, well pastor, how much should I give? Should I give a tithe? And some Bible scholars will tell you the tithe is never repeated in the New Testament. And I'd say you're absolutely right there. The tithe is a standard that they're giving in the Old Testament. But I want you to also understand that the tithe that is 10% was the baseline for the Jewish people in the Old Testament. That was not the ceiling.

[19:56] That was the floor. That's where they should start. And they would do the tithe and there were all these other offerings and things of that nature. And really what I have found in that when we ask those questions, what we're doing is we're trying to be legalistic in the matter rather than worshipful in the matter.

So we try not to answer that because it tells us as he may prosper. So our giving is in connection with our prosperity or our prospering. And when we realize this biblical principle that the only reason we prosper is because of the favor of God, that God bestows that upon us.

Now what we're doing is returning that which he's already given to us. And we're bringing our resources, which by the way are provided for him because he has caused us to prosper and we are putting them together and we're going to utilize them.

And he says, so that no collection may be made when I come. So what Paul is saying is, I don't want to make a show out of it. It's really not about me. Paul says it's not about him anyway because Paul wants to be seen as a good steward. Paul says, I'm not even going to bring the offering. He ends up bringing it because they want him to. But he said, I don't have to bring it. The other people can bring it. You know, whoever you want, I'll give them a letter. They'll go in my name and bring that offering to the saints. But we see this reality too, that not only were the resources brought together as an act of worship, not only were the resources, each individual decided what they should give.

[21 : 09] No one in the church stood up and told them. Each one did it in connection with the way God had enriched them. And they were doing it with a worshipful attitude, but they were doing it to minister to those outside of themselves.

They were sending it to Jerusalem. So these resources were being brought for the purpose of going somewhere else. Because as important as the local display of the kingdom is, this isn't the kingdom of God.

We're just a representation of the kingdom of God here. Just like any embassy of the United States, around the world, wherever it may be, it represents the United States in that locale, but it is not the fullness of the United States.

It is just a representation of the United States in a foreign land. We as a local church are a representation of the kingdom of God in Bortrace, which is a foreign land.

And we are here to reflect, but we understand that the resources that were being brought together as an act of worship, they were committed to the kingdom, not just to our kingdom. We see this.

[22 : 22] This was a grand opportunity that Paul was calling the people to. And by the way, that is one of the distinguishing marks of a true Christian community.

You know why? Because it takes a great leap of faith for us to genuinely be concerned about people we may never see, but we would be willing to support.

And we only do that when we have a genuine burden. This past week, I began to pray, just sharing a lot with you. And I began to pray and began to pray and it hasn't come yet, but I fully expect it.

God, give me a burden. A burden like the size of Nehemiah's that I just could not get away from. A burden that I would know I needed as individual and as a church, that's where we ought to be.

That's my prayer. Because that is what Paul is referring to here is these utilized resources. God, give me a burden that I could use whatever is mine and honestly, as a pastor, I have to think about this.

[23 : 26] Whatever is ours, you say, Pastor, are you going to use mine too? Well, yes, because you're entrusting us as a church. Whatever is ours, what can we do for your glory? That's the resources. That's what sets us apart.

The second thing that we notice that is a distinguishing mark of the Christian community is not only utilize resources, it's capitalized opportunities. It's capitalized opportunities. You know, each and every one of us have an opportunity presented to ourselves over and over and over again.

I would say just about every day is an opportunity to be laboring for the kingdom in some way, some manner, some fashion. And we see this when Paul writes to them in verse five.

He says, But I will come to you after I go through Macedonia, for I am going through Macedonia, and perhaps I will stay with you or even spend the winter so that you may send to me on my way wherever I may go. For I do not wish to see you now just in passing, for I hope to remain with you for some time if the Lord permits.

So understand this. Paul is planning his way. This is where we talked about in the introduction, man plans his steps, but the Lord directs his way, right? So Paul is operating by a penalty. By the way, Paul does none of these things because plans get changed.

[24 : 28] He does see the believers at Corinth in passing, though he didn't want to. He does have to go through there in haste, though that was not his plan because other things presented themselves. What we understand is that Paul was trying to be a good steward of his time here, and he was trying to plan his steps, but Paul also allowed room for God's leading.

Sometimes this is something that I'm afraid we don't do much in our society, is we are so conditioned to plan, to plan, to plan, to plan, to plan, and to dictate our time that we fail to leave room for the if the Lord permits.

The book of James says, do not say that you will go there and here and you'll do business over there for a year and a minute. You don't know if the Lord's going to allow you to do this. Say, rather, if the Lord wills, then I will do these things.

And the reason that distinguishes us is because then we are saying, God, we're trying to be good stewards of our time. God, we're trying to do the best we can. And so, Lord, we want to be intentional, but, Lord, even in our intentionality, we're going to give you the opportunity and the freedom to interrupt our plans.

And for some of us, that bothers us. For others, we're okay with that, but still, we have not built that into our schedule. And one thing that we need to do as a church, and one thing that we ought to do as individuals, is to leave room in the schedule for if the Lord wills.

[25 : 44] That is, it's okay if God changes plans. And it's okay if God does not do things the way we thought he was going to do them. And it's okay if what we thought we would do, we end up not doing and what we really didn't want to do.

Paul says, I don't want to go through in passing, but he actually does just go through in passing, that we are content there because we understand as good as our plans may be, God's leading is better.

And we're reminded of that because it allows us, without that freedom, by the way, if we so dictate our schedules and so dictate our time, without that freedom, we do not capitalize opportunities. Because we would rather look at opportunities as hindrance to keeping our schedule rather than looking at opportunities as a reason to stop. By the way, let's say it here, I've said it on a Wednesday night and I think I've said it here before, people are more important than process. The people in front of you are more important than the process you're trying to go through. And if the people in front of you interrupt your process, that's okay. Because God has called us to read people and not to commit processes.

[26 : 52] A robot can go through a process and go through it with astounding accuracy. Robots can do processes with mechanical, you know, we cannot even compare to that.

I remember when I was working at Nissan, I used to see these robots go through and they would weld things together and the robots would do the process, but the problem is is the robots would never do the process until a person put his finger up there and pushed the button or went through this little light thing, it kind of blew my mind.

But it always took people to do the process and if the person never put his hand up there to start the process, the robot would just sit still. But too many of us spend so much of our time worried about the process, we forget about the person.

We'll get to the people in just a minute. But we understand this reality that opportunities that present themselves to us need to be capitalized because Paul says it this way. He says, but I will remain at Ephesus until Pentecost.

So he's writing this letter from the city of Ephesus, which is where the book of Ephesians comes from. He's going to stay here until Pentecost. We don't know how long that is. Some can ascertain a little bit from the text and say it's a number of months away.

[27 : 51] But he says, I'm going to stay here until Pentecost. Why? For a wide door for effective service is open to me. That is, I have an opportunity. This is what I want to do, but I'm adjusting my wants to what I have the opportunity to do.

A wide door of effective service has opened for me. And then he follows it up with this, for there are many adversaries. So what Paul is saying, the reason I want to capitalize on this opportunity is because the adversary is here as well.

By the way, the presence of the adversary doesn't mean the opportunity is not there. It just means we need to stay a little longer. Because where the enemy is working, the church ought to be as well. And by the way, that's the greatest opportunity because Jesus says the calling of the church is to push back against the gates of hell and the hell would not be able to oppose it. So where we see the enemy working, and the church has the opportunity and when we pass by it because it doesn't fit our agenda, then we're failing to capitalize on the opportunity.

But the thing that sets the church apart is when the chance is there, it takes it. Erwin Lutzer, who is the former pastor of the Bible Church, said it this way, Satan is not bothered by your good

intentions.

[29 : 07] I don't know. I was going to do when we do, do, when we capitalize on the opportunities.

Warren Wiersbe, in writing his commentary on this passage, made the note that even in Roman society had a proverb that declared something along those lines, an opportunity not taken, is a victory never seen.

The church needs to take the opportunities. Paul says, a wide door is open and I'm going to stay because the enemy is here too. Too often, the door opens and the church doesn't have time to stay and we leave it to the enemy because when the door is open, the enemy is there as well and the enemy has his way.

Now that doesn't necessarily have to be on a grand scale. Sometimes, it's on a small scale. I'll never forget and I think I've shared it with you before. There was one day in the past, several years ago, I was in such a hurry, this one stands out to me because I so did not have the time to be a pastor that day.

I was trying to mow the yard, I was trying to finish everything up. I really, I didn't look like a pastor and that's okay but I had to run to the Christian bookstore for some reason that day and I was just, you know how it is, I'm going to go into the bookstore, hopefully nobody will see me, the people there know me but they'll excuse the fact I don't look like a pastor.

[30 : 41] I think I had cut off sleeve t-shirts on, you know, shorts, probably had boots on with my shorts, I looked really, you know, I was really fitting, really shouldn't have been out in public that way but it doesn't bother me so I'm running here real quick trying to slide in, slide out and I can't remember and I happened to be walking, I happened to pick up a book for someone because the next day we were leaving, the next day we were going to the Southern Baptist Convention and we were leaving the state, we were going out of town and I just had to get all these things together and I ran in and I was trying to blend in the wall if any of you have ever been to a Christian bookstore in town there, you know, I was kind of blending in along the wall and I was sliding around the Bibles and there was a man sitting there who was on his lunch break and he was asking the clerk about Bibles and I was like, well, that's, you know, and she didn't have an answer and I was like, well, somebody needs to give that man an answer, I gotta hurry up and get out of here, right, that was the good thing, he needs an answer and I stopped and I took the opportunity and I sat there and I said, the first thing I said, I know I don't look like a pastor but I'm a pastor, okay, so overlook my looks if you don't mind, had the opportunity to share Christ with that man, had the opportunity not only to lead him in the gospel, turns out his marriage was falling apart, his wife was getting ready to leave him with the kids they had, saw not only reconciliation in the marriage, saw both of them come to Christ a number of years after that, again, not about my kingdom, they were with us for a little while where I was pastoring at that time, they grew, they grew, they grew, they grew, they found a church closer to home that was easier for them to be a part of,

I blessed them, told them to go there, a number of years after that, he sent me a picture of that Bible that I was there that day, that I bought for him that day, he sent me a picture and said, just want you to know this Bible is going to, I think he was going to India on the mission field, but I didn't really have time, right, and that's just one story, there's tons of them, but you have them too, every one of us, we as a church have them, but we as individuals have them, but we need to leave room for that if the Lord wills, capitalize opportunities, number three, not only do we utilize resources, capitalize opportunities, number three, we prioritize people, we've already talked about this, people are more important to process and we see this with Paul because after this Paul says, but if Timothy comes to you, now if Timothy comes to you, see that he is with you without cause to be afraid for he's doing the Lord's work as I also am, now Timothy ends up being the pastor of the church at Ephesus, he's there so he makes his way back to where Paul is but he's a great friend of Paul's, he is the,

Paul considers him his child in the faith, but as is common with writings of Paul, Paul begins to list people, right, he even lists Apollos and he refers to Apollos as our brother, now there could have been concern for some maybe competitiveness with Apollos because even in the church at Corinth there were sects of people that said, oh I am of Apollos or I am of Paul and I am of Peter or I am of Christ and remember that's one of the things that Paul said in the very beginning neither one of us are anything but yet Paul doesn't see Apollos as a challenge, he doesn't see him as one he's in competition with, he doesn't see him, he just sees these people, he begins to list all these people and he sees them as laborers for the kingdom and he begins to lift them up and he begins to lift up

people of their own number, their church at Corinth, he lifts up the three, Stephanas, they came to him as one, he's the first one to come to Christ of that region, Paul himself baptized Stephanas and said, he and his household are the only one that I baptized there but he said they are laboring for the kingdom and he begins to lift up Aquila and Priscilla, I know it says Prissa but it's also Priscilla and they mention five times in scripture over five times in scripture and always have a church in their home, right?

And they're laboring and they're laboring and they're laboring and they're teaching and Paul is just highlighting the people that are being used, it's not about Paul, it's about others and Paul always has people around him, we need to prioritize people, your ministry is just as essential to the kingdom of God in my ministry, I have one small segment of ministry, Ephesians 4, 12, he gives some to be, he gives some, just one small sum to be pastors and teachers for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, your ministry is to take part in that work of service to the building up of the body of Christ, people are important, the pastor's called to equip, the saints are called to do and we're called to do it together, I as a saint am called to do it together, I'm a church member as well so I have responsibilities as a church member to do these things but we begin to see here that prioritization of people, people are so important because God has called us to do ministry, we understand that one, that one is easy to grasp, let's look at number four, what distinguishes the Christian community, number four, demonstrated faith, we see utilized resources, capitalized opportunities, prioritized people, demonstrated faith, stay with me,

I only have five, there's only five, right, demonstrated faith, Paul reminds them that they are called to be believers in a locale, they're a part of a grander kingdom but they're called to live out that kingdom in a particular location, as important as the grand kingdom is, as important as the kingdom of God is, as important, the location he's placed us is where he's called us to demonstrate that faith which we have in that kingdom and he tells them in verse 13, be on the alerts, stand firm in the faith, act like men and be strong, that is, live out your faith in the community that he's put you in and when you live out your faith, live out your faith with a conscious understanding of what's going on, be on the alert, your enemy prowls around, roaring around, seeking whom he may devour, be on the alert, understand the times, know what's going on around you but he tells you to stand firm in the faith, that is, to demonstrate one's faith, not to capitulate to society and to look like the rest of the world, rather it is to stand firm in the faith which may differentiate them from everyone else, it may cause people to be uncomfortable around them, it may make people even feel bad and woe and behold to us, if sinners understand the fact that they are sinners all because we know a perfect savior, then that is not of our own business, that is what we're called to do, right, we're called to be those to be the salt and the light, light penetrates, darkness doesn't like it, salt agitates and those that are in it don't like it but that's what we're called to be, it's called to stand firm in the faith, not to let the world dictate how we live out our faith and to act like men and to be strong, that is a demonstration of faith takes a little bit of backbone, it took it in the city of Corinth and it takes it in the day and time in which we live today, so that is, when we walk outside the doors of the church, we ought not be ashamed to live like we believe in Jesus Christ, we ought not be ashamed of the reality that we are different because Christ has called us and redeemed us and forgiven us and restored us and we walk in communion with a holy God and people are going to look at us like we're different and people are going to get mad at us because we make them feel bad and time and time and time again,

[37 : 30] I cannot tell you how many times I've had people say, oh well pastor, all you're doing, oh Billy Joe, all you're doing is making me feel bad, you're trying to make me feel bad? No, I'm not but if the reality of God's presence in my life convicts you of the wrong in your life, praise be to God because you need that conviction and so did I.

I still need it each and every day and I needed it then so that I would understand my need for a savior. It would be more harm if I would live as if nothing was ever wrong or to act like a man and be okay with that.

The reality that when I demonstrate my faith, I'm doing it because he's called me to but he cautions this with verse 14, let all that you do be done in love. It is truth in love.

We don't seek to harm the world just so they feel bad about themselves. We seek to live such a way in our faith. We seek to live in a way that convicts the world of their sin and makes people understand the wrong in which they are living and we seek to do this because we love them.

It is love that reveals the grand problem of mankind. It is love that would say what you are doing is leading you to a path of everlasting destruction. It is love that lives in such a way that makes people feel uncomfortable because the last thing we want them to do is to be comfortable in their sin because friend, listen to me, the wages of sin is death and every time I read the scripture I'm reminded of the reality that the same adjective that's used to describe the eternal destiny of the saints is also the same adjective that is eternal destiny of the lost.

[38 : 56] Some will be given to everlasting life and some will be given to everlasting punishment, everlasting death. This is the same adjective. So my anticipation and my hope for everlasting presence in God is equaled to the expectation of those who are apart from him and the everlasting destruction that they will experience.

And if I truly love the people, if I really love them, then I would live my life in such a way that maybe their life would be changed because they would be the savior. Charles Spurgeon said it this way, if men and women and boys and girls be doomed to go to hell, let them go to hell over our begging and pleading bodies.

Let them crawl over us. Let them go because we've laid down our lives and we've sacrificed for their sake. Let them not go because we've allowed them to go, but let them go because we're trying to save them and rescue them.

The Bible tells us that we ought to hate to sin but love the sinner. Friend, let all that you do be done in love. You say, well, I love them so I don't want to upset them. That's not love. Well, I love them and I don't want to offend them.

That's not love. Well, I love them and I just don't want to tell them they're doing wrong. That's not love. Love tells the truth even when they don't want to hear it. Love tells me the truth even when I don't want to hear it.

[40 : 04] Love tells me the things that I need to hear. There are only one person right now. Sometimes in the audience there's two, but right now there's only one person that could ever come to me in this congregation, walk up to me, tell me the hardest of things, tell me the things that I never want to hear and I would accept it from her mouth and it is my wife because I know that she loves me.

And now you say, well, pastor, I love you too. Well, for 25 years now she's demonstrated that love to me and for 25 years she's shown me that even if she tells me something I don't like, even if she tells me something that I don't really agree with and even if she tells me something that makes me so mad that it makes my blood full, I know she's doing it because she loves me and I allow her to do those things.

I allow her to have just freedom of speech even when she comes to me. Well, you know, you don't need to say that word over and over again. Sometimes it gets annoying. If some of you can, I'll be like, well, I'm sorry. You know, she's, I was like, okay, now I need to be a little bit more conscious of how I do it and the reason I stepped back away from the pulpit, she said, sometimes when you tap the pulpit, some of you back there now, she said, if you're sitting under the balcony, it sounds like a hammer's on there.

You know, and I was like, well, you're picking apart my preaching. She said, no, I love you and you're driving people insane. So, there you go. So, we understand these things. Why? Because of love. When we really love people, we tell them the truth.

But we tell them that truth for their good, not for our pleasure. Right? We tell them because we want them to know. And that's a demonstration of faith.

[41 : 25] God has given us the opportunity to live in such a world in which we can daily demonstrate our faith for the good of others. Which leads us to the fifth and final thing. The thing that really is the cornerstone that distinguishes the church from anything else.

It's an anticipated Savior. It's anticipated Savior. Paul, quite often, most times he would write the letters.

Historians will tell you his eyesight was affected from the Damascus road experience. So, quite often he would dictate the letters to his scribe. But it was the custom of Paul to take the pen in his hand at the end of the letters and say, now I'm going to sign my name to it so that you know that what has been said in here was not the opinion of the scribe, but it was the word of God coming through the man of God.

Verse 21, he says, this greeting is with my own hand, Paul. Signs his name. And then he gives this concluding remark. He writes this thing that sets the church apart from everything else.

He says, if anyone does not love the Lord, he is to be accursed. That's the word anathema. If anyone does not love the Lord, anathema. That is, it is impossible to be a part of the church and not love the Lord.

[42 : 46] He saw that as a impossibility. Because the thing that does everything else and everyone else is a genuine salvific love for the Lord.

And the word anathema, accursed he uses, is the same word that was used in the Old Testament when God brought his people into the land and there were cursed cities that were set apart in destruction.

He says, it is so impossible that if an individual does not love the Lord but thinks he can still be a part of the church, he is to be accursed and cast out to the darkness of the world.

That it cannot happen. That the love of the Lord should be the thing that sets it apart, sets him apart and sets the family apart. And then he declares this word, Maranatha. Maranatha is both an exclamation of praise and a declaration of prayer.

Maranatha means, O Lord, come. O Lord, come. Some of you have it translated in your scripture depending on which version you're reading.

[43 : 49] The Greek is Maranatha. And it means, O Lord, come. So he says, the anticipation of the Christian community is the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

It declares it in anticipation, O Lord, come. He is coming. He will come. And we're looking and hastening the day of his coming. And it is a prayer. God, in light of the world in which we live, we want you, O Lord, to come.

It is living with the reality of the coming of Christ. It sets the church apart. The earliest writings of Paul that you find in the New Testament are 1 and 2 Thessalonians.

They're the first letters he ever wrote. 1 and 2 Thessalonians Thessalonians are not long in chapters or in verse. But every verse of both of those books, both of those letters, every chapter, every chapter ends with a verse declaring the second coming of Christ.

The earliest anticipation of Paul, right after he accepted Christ, the first letter he wrote when God had called him to missionary service and God had called him to pastoral work, the first letters he wrote 1 and 2 Thessalonians spoke of his anticipation of the coming of Jesus Christ.

[45 : 10] He lived his life in light of that coming. You say, well, Paul died before Christ came, right, but his life looked radically different because he lived in light of that coming. He knew there would be a day when he came again.

Not only, as we looked at last week, do believers often live as if they will never live in eternity somewhere, that is, they live like the resurrection is not true. Sometimes believers live as if our Savior is not returning.

Because what if it be today? Will we want to be found where we're at individually and corporately as a church where we are today when our Savior comes? He said, well, Pastor, my eschatology tells me that the church will be raptured.

They'll have all these times of tribulation. My eschatology tells me that too. But eschatology is man's study of end times. What if my eschatology is wrong? The only way I can live in light of that reality is if I live each and every day like he's coming today.

And the thing that sets the church apart is they anticipate the coming Savior. We live like that. These other four things fall in line.

[46 : 21] Would you pray with me? Lord, I thank you so much for this day. Lord, we thank you for the book of 1 Corinthians. We thank you for the truths which it has taught us. We thank you for the challenges which it has given us.

But Lord, we know those truths and those challenges mean little if we do not live them out. So Lord, we thank you more for the presence of the Spirit within us that would bring these things to mind, that it would call us as your people to action.

Lord, if there be one here today who does not know you, I pray, Lord, that the first steps they would take would be a step of committing their life to Jesus Christ. Lord, for those of us that know you as our Lord and Savior, may our next step be a more radical commitment to following and obeying you.

Lord, we ask that you be glorified and honored in all that takes place. And we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Would you take out your hymnals?

Amen. Amen.

[48 : 29] Amen. Amen.
Amen. Thank you.