

1 Corinthians 16

This paper describes the outline of the presentation of 1 Corinthians 16 and discusses the collection for the Saints in Jerusalem (verses 1 - 4).

Paul writes this letter from Ephesus and in this passage, he explains that he wants to visit Corinth and probably wants to stay the winter in Corinth because travelling during wintertime (November – March) was dangerous (Meeks, 2003, p. 18).

Structure of the chapter

The passage could be divided into the following sections (Anderson, 2008; Weima, 1994) but it is not the only valid division (Thiselton, 2000, 1315):

- Verses 1 - 11 Now concerning the collection and travel plans
- Verse 12 Now concerning Apollos
- Verses 13 - 24 Greetings and closing

This division is based upon the Greek word *Peri*, meaning *Now concerning*. It is the sixth time in this letter that Paul uses this word to introduce a subject (7:1, 7:25, 8:1, 8:4, 12:1; 16:12) and if the pattern of the previous occurrences holds true than this transition suggest a response to issues raised by the Corinthians (Garland, 2003, p. 751). Given this I think this division is valid enough and the most plausible.

Chapter 16 seems to underline Paul authority in matters of the behaviour of the church and one key element in this is unity and love¹ for each other. This is demonstrated in the part when Paul is talking about the visit of Timothy. In addition, he seems to underline this with the fact that he motivated Apollos to visit the church. Anderson (2008, p. 247) suggest that the Corinthians could have asked Paul to send Apollos back and that Paul is giving an answer here why Apollos did not come back.

The closing verses, 13 – 24, are a common ending of letters although the ending is edited by Paul to underline the unity with the other churches and unity within the church and the authority of the first members (Stephanus) in the church (Weima

¹ Love in verses 13-24, Weima (1994, p. 203) states, 'one distinctive feature of the letter closing of 1 Corinthians is its emphasis on the theme of love.'

1994). Also Anderson (2008) argues that there were only a few baptised members and that the church was too small to have a leadership team, so that could be why Paul is urging the Corinthians to subject them to the Authority of household of Stephanus (verse 15-16).

The collection for the saints and its implication for mission

Jewish and Greco-Roman background to giving

In Jewish culture, it was common to give away ten percent to support the poor and the widows. Probably Paul was used to tithing himself (Murray, 2000) but it is never mentioned in the NT (Brown, 1986, p. 854). Paul speaks in 1 Corinthians 16 of *Logea (Collection)* and this word only occurs here in the NT. Founded papyri can explain the meaning of Logea. This word means an irregular financial contribution towards city service or religious service, as opposed to regular taxes (Thiselton, 2000, p. 1318). However, Brown (1986, p. 854) suggest this word could mean a tax and implies the tithe concept, but how does that work out, if all the references in the NT speak of bringing the gifts to Jerusalem only once?

Giving towards charity in Greco-Roman culture was something unusual. A Roman citizen would expect honour and loyalty for giving (Meeks, 2003; Stambaugh and Balch, 1986). Garland (2003, p. 752) states,

This worldview assumes that it is most blessed to receive honor from others, and that is what motivated giving. By contrast, Paul expects the Corinthians to do good works for people they have never met so as to bring praise to God and not to themselves.

Another historical issue is the transfer of money after the collection. We are used to send money from one end of the world to the other. However, in the time of this letter, someone had to carry and take the collection to Jerusalem, with all sorts of problems such as security on the road, the physical size of the collection (Wright, 2003, p. 229).

The collection

Now concerning the collection for the saints (v1). Other passages in the bible deal also with the collection for the saints in Jerusalem (2 Cor 8-9; Rom 15:25-28; Gal 2:10; Acts 6:1-6). This passage does not explain why the Corinthians had to give or who the receivers are. The first verse only mentions giving to the saints, which could mean believers (Anderson, 2008, p. 243) and in light of verse 3 and the other passages it is likely then that this collection is for the believers in Jerusalem. Guzik (2001) states that there were many widows in Jerusalem (Acts 6) and that

there was a famine foretold in Acts 11, and happened between AD. 41 - 48 (Williams, 1990, p. 206). According to Jervis (1990, p. 60) the believers in Jerusalem could also be poor because they sold all they had, including their source of income, to share in community.

As I directed the churches of Galatia (v1). What did Paul direct to the churches of Galatia? The word *directed* has a stronger sense in Greek, meaning command or order and therefore this would emphasize Paul's authority (Thiselton, 2000; Anderson, 2008). Collins (1999, p. 588) states, that Paul was probably referring to the churches in the Roman Province of Galatia, rather than the region of the kingdom of Galatia because it would then include the churches of Antioch in Pisidia, Iconium, Derbe, and Lystra which are all founded by Paul.



Figure 1 Source: nl.wikipedia.org – Oops, it is Wikipedia, should I use this image?

Except for the passage in Galatians 2:10, there is no other evidence in the NT for what Paul ordered the churches in Galatians, presumably the Corinthians have heard of this instruction and they could be reconstructed from the next verses (Collins, 1999, p. 588; Barrett, 1968, p. 386). Thiselton (2000, p. 1320) states,

Paul's allusion to his directions to the churches of Galatia establishes not only the solidarity between those who give and those who receive but also the co-solidarity of the wider community of givers in their common recognition of the need for support for the Jerusalem church.

Garland (2003, p. 753) notes that a reason for mention the directions to the churches Galatia could be that it suggest how many others are involved and how

their examples should be followed. A reason why the churches of Macedonia are not mentioned here could be that Paul did not ask them and which he did in 2 Corinthians 8-9 (Garland, 2003, p. 753).

On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up (v2). Commentators differ about the translation of the verse because in Greek it says the *first-day-after-the-Sabbath*, which could be understood as our contemporary understanding of Sunday, meaning Day of the Lord and on which we come together in a church service. In addition, in Greek this verse also say, *let him or her put aside at home* (Thiselton, 2000, p. 1322). This leads to confusion because did Paul mean that the church should collect every first-day-of-the-week (Sunday) as they came together, but what does Paul then mean with collecting at home? Also, if Paul mentions collecting at home, why would he then prescribe a special day for this? I think the key for understanding this verse is to look at the Corinthians understanding of the first-day-after-the-Sabbath, what did they do at this day, and what meaning has this day for them?

Anderson (2008, p. 243) notes that the Corinthians did not have the same understanding of the week as we have. It had rather an astronomical meaning, then a sociological one. Barrett (1968, p. 387) states, 'that is on Sunday; it is not mentioned here as a day when Christians meet for worship.' Barrett makes a link with Revelation 1:10, which mentions of the Day of the Lord. Thiselton (2000, p. 1322) gives a summary of the debate whether the first-day-of-the-week could be understood as a special day for worship. He states that from we have enough evidence to state that the Sunday was a special day for worship around the start of the 2nd century A.D. This debate leaves us with the question whether the Corinthians had to collect every Sunday in a worship service, or whether it was meant to put something aside regularly at home. However, it is not an individual collection but a collective collection (Anderson, 2008, p. 243)!

As he may prosper (v2). Fee (1987, p. 814) argues that a literal rendering of the Greek would allow an interpretation for putting aside all the profits. However, he argues there were probably quite a few slaves in the church who had no income at all and therefore everybody should put aside with whatever prosperity may have come each week. In addition, Thiselton (2000, p. 1323) translate this part of the verse as follow, 'in accordance with how you may fare.' Because he argues that the Greek word for *prosper* also connotation of journeying. Therefore, the NBV (Dutch) translates correctly, *naar vermogen*, which means 'as he is able to'. Therefore I

think, that this says more about, giving as one is able to, then about a rule of tithing. It also implies giving from what one received rather than from what one does not have.

So that there will be no collecting when I come (v2). Also, 2 Corinthian 9:5,

So I thought it necessary to urge the brothers to go on ahead to you and arrange in advance for the gift you have promised, so that it may be ready as a willing gift, not as an **exaction**.

Thus, Paul wants to have this gift ready when he comes, he does not want to chase after the money. Also Garland (2003, p. 754) argues that in verse 3 Paul uses the word *Charis* (*grace*) for gift and therefore the Corinthians should give freely as how they wish.

Paul prescribe a strategy of giving, which is saving every week a little bit (as one is able to) so that when he comes it is a large amount (Collins, 1999, p. 586).

And when I arrive, I will send those whom you accredit by letter to carry your gift to Jerusalem (v3). Garland (2003, p. 755) states, 'as each individual decides how to give, the church decides whom they will entrust to represent them in this mission.' In 2 Corinthians 8:19. Thiselton (2000, p. 1324) notes, 'If Corinth raises a substantial sum, its transmission to the Jerusalem recipients must be by those whom the Corinthians themselves fully trust, whose integrity is above suspicion at Corinth.'

Paul will also give the people who are chosen by the church a recommendation letter for the Jerusalem church, because he is not sure if he will go himself (Garland, 2003, p. 755). Giving the accredit persons a recommendation letter was a normal thing to do (Anderson, 2008, p. 244). Fee (1987, p. 815) notes different passages where such a letter is given, Acts 15:23 – 29, Romans 16: 1-2, and 2 Corinthians 8:16-24.

As said earlier, the word for gift *Charis*, means grace, and could be translated as an act of thanks (Anderson, 2008, p. 244). It is as if the Corinthian church (mainly gentiles) should show a sign of thanks towards the Jerusalem church (mainly Jews) for their spiritual gift. It is also as if it binds them together, as a sign that the gentiles are now part of God's people.

If it seems advisable that I should go also, they will accompany me (v4). Paul is not sure whether he is going to Jerusalem or not. When he goes at least the

delegation from the Corinthian church should go with him. The reasons for this are that it was common to travel together and also that the Corinthian church is introduced in Jerusalem to unify them (Collins, 1999). Thiselton (2000, p. 1326) notes, 'given the hazards and dangers of travel in the ancient world, going in reasonable numbers assisted safety, security and mutual support.'

If it seems advisable that I should go. When is it advisable for Paul to go to Jerusalem? Paul seems to leave the question open when it is advisable. The reason why Paul should go or not, seem to be answered differently by different commentators (Thiselton, 2000, p. 1326). Fee (1987, p. 816) argues that the word advisable could also be translated as *worthy*. He rightly asks the question from what perspective it seems advisable. Is it the perspective of the gift, the Corinthians or the situation in Jerusalem? In any case by the time Paul wrote 2 Corinthians he had decided to go to Jerusalem (2 Corinthians 1:16; Romans 15:25).

Theological significance of the collection

The theological significance of the collection for the saints in Jerusalem is explained in depth in 2 Corinthians 8 – 9, and Romans 15: 25 – 29. Thiselton (2000, p. 1318) explains the collection as an act of fellowship, partnership, sharing, solidarity, sometimes bringing a blessing, and sometimes as an act as services to God. It goes too far for the purpose of this paper to explain in depth what each of these terms means. The passages above contain many references to Old Testament scriptures (Murray, 2000).

By putting aside every week as one is able to do, the individual members of the church have an awareness that they are part of the wider community, that is the believers in Jerusalem. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 8: 12 – 14,

For if the readiness is there, it is acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have. I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened, but that as a matter of fairness your abundance at the present time should supply their need, so that their abundance may supply your need, that there may be fairness.

Paul is emphasizing the unity of the world-wide-church. Hays (1997, p. 284) adds to this that Paul had an eschatological sign, symbolizing the Gentiles' recognition of Israel's God as the one God of all the earth (Isaiah 2:2-3). As Wright (2006, p. 524) writes, 'which was precisely what the Old Testament had foreseen: the nations responding in obedience to the living God manifested through bringing offerings to his people.'

Wright (2003) notes that the use of the collection by Paul is twofold:

To signal to the **Gentile** Christians that they are part of the same family as the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem; and, more importantly still, to signal to the Jewish Christians that those Gentiles out there, who have come to **faith** in Jesus as the **Messiah** and the true Lord of the world, are part of the same family as they are, even though they haven't become Jews in the process. (Emphasis in original).

Our motivation towards giving

In our culture of today, it is common to give towards charities. In the Netherlands, it is possible to claim tax back from the money given towards charities. My observation is that this is quite similar in the UK. The government supports and encourage giving towards charities. This is different from the Greco-Roman world, where giving towards charity was completely different. Thus, with reading the text we should be aware of this culture-gap in what we understand as a collection.

I draw two application points from this passage. First as Garland (2003, p. 752) noted that the collections brings the glory to God. How does this work out with our giving? What is our primary motivation towards giving and tithing and what influence has contemporary culture on this?

Funding of mission

The only requirement Paul has by bringing the gospel to the gentiles is to remember the poor (Galatians 2:10). How does this affect mission? In my opinion, it says something about the bond between the new-planted churches, e.g. Corinth, and the sending church, Jerusalem. The way we are used to do mission was to send missionaries to '*poor*' countries and because we are rich we gave the missionaries some money for the church in the '*poor*' countries. Is this biblical then? Should the new-planted churches in the '*poor*' country collect money for the church in the west or for supporting the missionary? But this is different than the context of the Corinth church, where the Corinth church was probably richer than the Jerusalem church.

Discussion points

1. In some churches the offering, which is held during the service, is intended for the church itself, e.g. rent of the building, the salary of the pastor. How does this practice of collecting money for one's own church relate to this passage and to the wider context of the collection for the saints in Jerusalem?
2. What do you think of the following thesis: 'New planted churches should contribute through a (irregular) collection towards the mother churches or churches in the west'?
3. What about when the mother church is from the South?
4. What is our motivation towards giving to charity or the church? And how do we give? Is this motivation biblical (according to this passage)?

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