

1 Corinthians 16

You might say the church in Corinth had a very impractical faith. They had trouble connecting reality with spirituality. Sure, they believed in Jesus. They experienced miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit. They were enthusiastic in supporting their favorite preachers and teachers. But that's about where their Christianity stopped. At the same time, they were divided. They fought with each other in church and took their arguments into secular courts. They freely engaged in immoral relationships and frequented pagan temples if they happened to like the food. Christianity in Corinth was a faith that didn't work.

This problem still exists. The separation the spiritual from the practical, of faith from reality, remains a chronic problem today. One possible measurement of this is the Wikipedia entry entitled "List of Christian evangelist scandals", which documents no fewer than 27 major scandals, mostly in America, all but one within the last 40 years, 16 of them since the year 2000. Read it for yourself [here](#).

As Paul ends his first letter to the church in Corinth he brings up a bunch of very practical stuff. Paul's spirituality was firmly planted in the real world.

Our Christian faith needs to be real. We cannot detach our beliefs from routine, practical concerns.

- I. 16:1-4 The churches in Greek-speaking areas were getting together some money to help the poorer believers in Jerusalem. Paul wants to avoid a high pressure approach when he comes to Corinth and it doesn't matter to him if he takes the gift personally or not.
 - A. Believers need to be generous and respond in times of need – as in disaster relief.
 - B. We should practice systematic giving. Our charity should not be driven by emotional high-pressure appeals.
 - i. "Giving is not God's way of raising money, but his way of raising children."
Giving to God's work in a systematic way develops our character. On the one hand it makes us generous; on the other hand it makes us less susceptible to high-pressure tactics that try to make us feel guilty if we don't give.
 - C. We should give in proportion to what we have, "storing up as he may prosper" (16:2). This is why giving a percentage, like a tithe, makes so much sense. If you don't make any money, you give nothing – and maybe someone should give something to you. If you make a little, you give a little. If you make a lot you give a lot. No pressure, no pulling on your heartstrings, no guilt.
 - D. Churches working together accomplish more than those working alone.
 - E. All of this is a very practical approach to the very spiritual practice of giving.
- II. 16:5-9 Paul planned the work he did for Jesus. As we read the NT, especially Acts, we that his plans were somewhat flexible. Sometimes they didn't work out at all. Still, he planned; he was intentional. When he could, which was almost all of the time; he followed through on his plans and did what he set out to do. There need not be any contradiction between being led by the Holy Spirit and an intentional, well-planned ministry.

- A. We should also plan our ministry – our involvement in Christian service.
- B. God’s work requires intentionality and commitment from God’s people.
 - i. From God’s side, the most important one, God simply has to work. Without that nothing will ever happen.
 - ii. From our side, we should consider the words of that great philosopher Woody Allen, who said, “Eighty percent of success is showing up.” Similarly, 80% of success in any ministry we’re involved in is simply showing up. If you aren’t there God won’t use you. Most important ability in ministry: dependability.
- C. When opposition or adversity comes – and it will come – our planning and determination will help us to follow through. Paul is determined to stay in Ephesus because of the open door and despite the many adversaries. If we follow the church through the NT, even just reading the book of Acts, we find that effectiveness and difficulty normally went hand in hand.
- D. **Personal illustration:** Trip to Eastern Europe delivering Bibles, two flat tires within four or five hours of leaving our base. We spent the night in a rest area in Germany while we waited for someone to bring us a new tire. There were four on the team, of which I was the leader. Two were convinced that the flat tires were a sign that God didn’t want us to make the trip. The other guy and I were ready to go on. We got our tire, went on, and the two doubters came along with us. We delivered all our Bibles. Mission accomplished. We followed through on our plan. (By the end of the trip I began to wish the doubters had stayed home, but that should probably be a different story.)

Serving the Lord takes planning and determination to follow through on our plans.

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- III. 16:10-19 God’s work is always done as part of a team.
 - A. The Corinthians fought among themselves and rallied behind various leaders. Much of the church never quite got the concept of working together.
 - B. Paul names Timothy, Apollos, Stephanas, Fortunatus, Achaicus and Aquila & Priscilla. He was part of a group that worked together. Paul saw the Corinthians’ rivalries as a problem. He personally made it a point to work together with others.
 - C. Leaders should be treated respectfully. A wise leader will not be overly authoritative, but those who do not bear the responsibilities of leadership should respect those individuals who do. The Corinthians may have respected – or even idolized – their favorite leader while disrespecting other perfectly godly men.
 - i. 16:10 Timothy. New Living translates this verse as follows:

Cor 16:10 NLT *When Timothy comes, don’t intimidate him. He is doing the Lord’s work, just as I am.*

- ii. 16:15-16 Stephanas and his household: submit to such.
- iii. 16:17-18 S, F & A: Acknowledge such men.
- iv. Paul is teaching them the value of respecting all of those in charge.

IV. A few quick directives 16:13-14: Watch, stand fast, be brave, be strong, love.

- A. Watch. The Corinthians had numerous problems in their church. We need to keep our eyes open for the various ways Satan may try to undermine the Lord's work. In Corinth he used all of these things:
 - i. Disunity
 - 1. Infighting
 - 2. Rallying behind favorite teachers: Paul, Apollos, Peter or whoever.
 - ii. Immorality
 - iii. Self-centered immaturity in any number of areas: In the use of spiritual gifts, In the midst of fellowship meals. Women who were being disorderly. Believers who were not respecting the consciences of others.
- B. Stand fast in the faith:
 - i. False teaching can come in very quickly.
 - ii. Exercise of liberties can easily lead to a backslidden state. Walking too close to the world can lead us – or other – to slip right back into it.
- C. Be brave, be strong. The Christian life is not for weak-willed people. Sometimes it simply takes guts to stand up under various trials or to stick to our convictions.
- D. 16:14 **Let all that you do be done in love.** Consider how all-encompassing this is. The word "let" should remind us that God will work this love into our lives if we let him.

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V. Notice the importance of fellowship:

- A. 16:20 The connections between believers. Good for the Corinthians to remember as they were constantly fighting with one another. The "holy kiss" need not be a sticky point for us. Kissing was a cultural form of greeting there as it still is in many places.

1 Cor 16:20 NLT *All the brothers and sisters here send greetings to you. Greet each other **with Christian love.***

- B. 16:19-20 Or between churches: Corinth, Asia, Galatia and the gift going to Jerusalem.

VI. 16:22 Basic doctrinal stuff:

- A. I think it was Jay Adams who said that a *Christian* sermon is a sermon that would cause you to get thrown out of a synagogue or a mosque.

- i. This verse alone would probably do that for Paul.
- ii. The reason is that Christianity is totally built on the person of Jesus Christ. It is not merely a philosophy, code of conduct or system of beliefs. Jesus takes us as we are, but we also take him as he is. We take the Jesus who said both of these things:

Matt 11:28-30 NKJV ²⁸*Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.*
²⁹*Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.* ³⁰*For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."*

Matt 16:24 NKJV *Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me."*

- B. Accursed = Greek *Anathema* Paul's point is that we need Jesus.
 - C. O Lord come! (Our Lord, come!) = Aramaic *Maranatha* This puts our mind on Christ's return. Christ coming back is not just a doctrine for prophecy enthusiasts, but something that should motivate our Christian life from day to day.
- VII. 16:23-24 Grace and love. The grace is from Jesus. The love in this case is Paul's. He loved these Corinthian believers, even with all their faults.
- A. Question worth asking ourselves is, "Do other Christians know that I love them?" If not, then maybe our faith isn't really practical enough. Maybe our faith has been divorced from reality.

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Conclusions:

The Christian faith is not simply a belief in Jesus. It's not simply saying yes to several points of doctrine. We certainly need to believe in Jesus and say yes to several points of doctrine, but if our faith is not lived out in a number of practical areas, then our faith isn't real enough. Some of the areas Paul touched on today were:

1. Giving. A real faith will impact our wallet. Not because someone manipulates us with emotional, urgent appeals, but because we are generous with others and have a real desire to give to God's work.
2. We will serve the Lord intentionally. We will plan our Christian service.
3. We will work together with others and respect the leaders God puts over us.
4. We'll be committed to fellowship with other believers.
5. We will let all that we do be done in love.
6. We will firmly hold onto our basic Christian beliefs. Jesus will be the center of our existence. We will love him and look forward to his return.