

## OUR CHRISTIAN RESPONSIBILITIES

*16 Now concerning the collection for the saints: Just as I instructed the churches of Galatia, so I request that you do the same. 2On the first day of [the week] each of you should set aside a portion of your income, so that no collections be made when I come. 3Then, when I arrive, I will send the men whom you approve, [along] with letters [of introduction], to deliver your gift to Jerusalem. 4If it seems advisable for me to go also, [then] they will accompany me.*

*5After I have gone through Macedonia I will come to you, for I will [only] pass through Macedonia. 6But if it is possible, I will stay with you and spend the winter, so that you may send me on my journey, wherever I may go. 7I do not wish to see you now [only] in passing; [rather,] I hope to spend some time with you, if the Lord permits. 8I will remain in Ephesus until Pentecost, 9[because] a great door [for] effective [ministry] has opened to me, and there are many who are opposing me.*

*10Now if Timothy comes, see to it that he is welcomed among you, for he is doing the Lord's work, just as I am. 11Therefore, let no one treat him with contempt; but send him on his way in peace, so that he may return to me, for I am expecting him [along] with the brothers.*

*12Now concerning our brother Apollos: I strongly urged him to come to you with the brothers; but he was not at all willing to come at this time. But he will come when he has the opportunity.*

*13Be on your guard. Stand firm in the faith. Act like men. Be strong. 14Let all that you do be done in love.*

*15You know that the household of Stephanas was the first fruits of Achaia and that they have devoted themselves in service to the saints. I exhort you, brothers, 16to be subject to such men as these and to all who are fellow workers and laborers.*

*17Now I rejoice at the arrival of Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus, for they have made up for your absence. 18They have refreshed my spirit and yours. Therefore, give due recognition to such men.*

*19The churches in the province of Asia send you greetings. Aquila and Priscilla, along with the church that meets in their house, send you hearty greetings in the Lord. 20All the brothers send you greetings. Greet one another with a holy kiss. 21I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. 22If anyone does not love the Lord, let him be under the curse of God. May our Lord come! 23The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you. 24My love is with all of you in Christ Jesus. (1 Cor. 16:1-24)*

### **Introduction**

A local newspaper reported the incredible story of two teenage boys who attended the same high school. Because the one was two years younger than the other and was also new to the school, the boys were barely aware of each other. Yet people who knew both of them kept telling them how much they looked alike. They even talked alike and walked alike!

As more and more people told them how much alike they were, the two boys became curious about each other. When they both reported for basketball tryouts, they had the chance to meet, to watch each other, and to talk. The older boy confided to the younger that he was an adopted child; the younger shared that he, too, was adopted. As they continued to talk, they discovered that they were both born in the same city.

Intrigued by what they had thus far discovered about each other, they decided to investigate further. One of the adoptive mothers inquired on behalf of the boys and discovered that the two boys actually were blood brothers who had been adopted by two different families.

Once the boys found out that they were truly related, their relationship changed. Whereas once they had merely nodded to each other in the hallways, now they spent hours together, piecing together the story of their lives. The two boys began to love each other as brothers (*POWER*, 1/13/91, p. 8.)

As brothers and sisters in the Lord Jesus Christ, we should be doing the same as these two blood brothers. We must recognize that as members of Christ's spiritual body we are related to one another and have responsibilities to one another. As we study the sixteenth chapter of 1 Corinthians, let us consider three Christian responsibilities we have to one another as members of the body of Christ.

### **I. Let Us Fulfill Our Christian Responsibility to Care for Those Fellow Believers Who are in Need (16:1-4)**

Having exhorted the church to *"always abound in the work of the Lord"* (1 Cor. 15:5,) Paul now presents an opportunity for them to do so: the offering for the saints.

An offering was being received from the churches of Galatia, Achaia and Macedonia to assist the needy Christians of Judea who suffered personal loss due to persecution (note Hebrews 10:32-34), compounded by famine (note Acts 11:27-30),

*Remember those earlier days after you had received the light, when you stood your ground in a great contest in the face of suffering. <sup>33</sup>Sometimes you were publicly exposed to insult and persecution; at other times you stood side by side with those who were so treated. <sup>34</sup>You sympathized with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions.* (Heb. 10:32-34), the writer to the Hebrews is reminding the Hebrew Christians of the persecution they endured in the recent past

*During this time some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. <sup>28</sup>One of them, named Agabus, stood up and through the Spirit predicted that a severe*

*famine would spread over the entire Roman world. (This happened during the reign of Claudius.)* <sup>29</sup>*The disciples, each according to his ability, decided to provide help for the brothers living in Judea.* <sup>30</sup>*This they did, sending their gift to the elders by Barnabas and Saul. (Acts 11:27-30)*

In verse 2 Paul instructs the Corinthian church as to how to prepare their offering. On the first day of the week, each one was to make a contribution according to their own judgment, (i.e.; whatever amount each one thought to be appropriate and affordable, depending upon their own financial abilities.) Note: This special offering was above and beyond the tithe. These weekly offerings were to be stored up by the church in anticipation of the apostle's coming. This procedure was to be followed so that it would not be necessary to take up a special offering at the time of Paul's arrival. Paul desired to avoid pressuring the Corinthians to give a substantial amount just he was present, Paul did not want their offering to be "extorted" from them out of a sense of compulsion or from a desire to impress the apostle. Furthermore, his intention was to avoid giving the unbelieving community the false impression that the apostle Paul was receiving a large personal fee for his ministry.

In verses 3-4 Paul goes on to explain how the church's offering will be transported to Jerusalem. When Paul arrives at Corinth, the church will present to him those men whom the congregation has chosen to personally bring their offering to Jerusalem. The apostle will then write letters to the church in Jerusalem certifying that these men are the messengers appointed by the Corinthian church. If the church thinks it advisable for Paul himself to bring their gift to Jerusalem, then these messengers will accompany him, in order to witness that their gift was indeed given to the Jerusalem church in the name of the Corinthian Christians.

As we consider the instructions the Apostle Paul gives to the Corinthian church, we not only learn of our responsibility to care for our brothers who may be in need, but also how we should do so. From verse 1 we learn that we do have a Christian obligation to provide for fellow believers who are in material and financial need, as Paul informs the Philippian church, *"Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others"* (Phil. 2:4.) Note, too, his counsel to the Ephesian church, *"He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with those in need"* (Eph. 4:28.) In the Christian's life there is to be not only a change of behavior (from stealing to honest work,) but also an even more fundamental change of attitude (from taking advantage of others to caring for others and seeking to meet their needs.)

From verse 2 we learn that we are to fulfill our obligation to one another out of love and commitment to Christ, rather than as a reaction to coercive pressure imposed upon us. By the grace of God at work within us, our love for one another should be patterned after the exhortation of the Apostle John:

*This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. <sup>17</sup>If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? <sup>18</sup>Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth. (1 Jn. 3:16-18)*

Also, we should appreciate the fact that our obligation is determined according to our financial ability, not beyond our financial capabilities, as Paul will remind the Corinthians in his next epistle to them:

*Now finish the work, so that your eager willingness to do it may be matched by your completion of it, **according to your means**; <sup>12</sup>for if the willingness is there, **the gift is acceptable according to what one has**, not according to what he does not have. <sup>13</sup>Our desire is not that others might be relieved while you are hard pressed. (2 Cor. 8:11-13a)*

Note, too, the description of the disciples' giving as presented in the Book of Acts: *"The disciples, **each according to his ability**, decided to provide help for the brothers living in Judea" (Acts 11:29.)*

From verses 3-4 we learn that we should carry out our obligation with discretion and sensitivity; the Apostle Paul was concerned that all things be done honorably: *"we take thought for things honorable, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men" (2 Cor. 8:21.)* In our giving we must be careful not to exalt ourselves and not to belittle the Christian brother who is the recipient of our ministry. In our giving we must be guided by our Lord's counsel:

*So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. <sup>3</sup>But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, <sup>4</sup>so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. (Matt. 6:2-4)*

## **II. Let Us Fulfill Our Christian Responsibility to Respect Those Who Minister to Us (16:5-16)**

In verses 5-9 Paul informs the Corinthians of his travel plans and his desire to spend some extended time at Corinth. His hope was to possibly spend the winter at Corinth, rather than just pass through and have only a brief visit with the church. He anticipates that the Corinthian church *"will help him on his journey."* The Greek term, προπέμπω, has the meaning of supplying someone with provisions, encouragement and refreshment.

From 2 Corinthians 1:16-18 we learn that Paul was prevented from following through with his proposed plan—and the Corinthians interpreted his absence as an indication of insincerity and lack of trustworthiness:

*I planned to visit you on my way to Macedonia and to come back to you from Macedonia, and then to have you send me on my way to Judea. <sup>17</sup>When I planned this, did I do it lightly? Or do I make my plans in a worldly manner so that in the same breath I say, “Yes, yes” and “No, no”? <sup>18</sup>But as surely as God is faithful, our message to you is not “Yes” and “No.” (2 Cor. 1:16-18)*

When we are in positions of ministry, we must do our best to be above reproach, (note again the apostle’s policy concerning the delivery of the Corinthians’ offering as outlined in 1 Corinthians 16:3-4;) note, also, 1 Timothy 3:2a, “*Now the overseer [or, elder] must be above reproach.*” How must we honestly answer such questions as: Can people trust me with confidential information? Do my relationships with people grow deeper, or do they become superficial, when people learn what I am really like? Can people confidently recommend me for a significant task without fear of my letting them down?

Conversely, we must be generous in our estimation of others, especially those who seek to minister to us. We should attribute to them good intentions, even as we would want them to so evaluate our motives and intentions. We should take into account the fact that sometimes they may be hindered from following through on their intentions and promises through no fault of their own.

In verses 10-11 Paul instructs the church as to how they are to receive Timothy. He was not to be intimidated nor treated with contempt. Because Timothy was a young man, and some of the Corinthians tended to do as they pleased, even to the extent of defying apostolic authority, Paul finds it necessary to give such instructions. Timothy is to be treated with respect and given support and cooperation by the church. This is so because he is carrying on the work of the Lord; that is to say, he comes as a minister of Christ and is seeking to minister to the church on behalf of Christ, note Hebrews 13:17,

*Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you. (Heb. 13:17)*

In verse 12 Paul informs the church concerning the plans of Apollos. He identifies Apollos as “*our brother.*” Whereas the Corinthians created a false rivalry between the various ministers of the gospel (1 Cor. 1:12,) Paul is here reminding them of the oneness of purpose and relationship that the ministers of the gospel have in Christ. Paul assures the Corinthians that he earnestly urged Apollos to come to Corinth. Rather than jealously viewing the Corinthian church as his personal sphere of ministry with himself being the exclusive minister to the Corinthians, Paul desires Apollos to use his gifts for the Corinthians’ progress

in the faith. Here is exhibited a true partnership in the work of the ministry, as opposed to pursuing self-aggrandizement in the name of Christian ministry.

In verses 15-16 Paul makes reference to the household of Stephanas, a Corinthian family that was prominent in the ministry of the church. The Corinthians are urged to recognize and appreciate the fact that the household of Stephanas has devoted themselves to the service of God's people, and they are exhorted to submit to such as these and to everyone who joins in the work of the ministry and labors at it. When you find a Christian brother (or a whole family) who is giving himself in service to Christ's church, we are to appreciate his labor and work with him for the cause of Christ.

Let us fulfill our Christian responsibility to respect those who minister to us. Rather than finding fault with what they are doing, let us pray for them, appreciate them, cooperate with them, support them (note, again, Hebrews 13:17, referred to above;) and let us join them in actively serving Christ and His church.

Let us appreciate those who serve Christ with the same spirit as Timothy, and may we seek to imitate them:

*I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, so that I also may be cheered when I receive news about you. <sup>20</sup>I have no one else like him, who takes a genuine interest in your welfare; <sup>21</sup>for everyone looks out for his own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. <sup>22</sup>But you know that Timothy has proved himself, because as a son with his father he has served with me in the work of the gospel. (Phil. 2:19-22)*

### **III. Let Us Fulfill Our Christian Responsibility to Be in Fellowship with Fellow Believers (16:17-24)**

In verses 17-18 Paul testifies that he rejoices in the arrival of Stephanas and his companions who were fellow members of the Corinthian church—the reason being the fact that *“they have made up for your absence.”* The Greek terms, ὑμέτερος and ὑστέρημα, sometimes translated by the phrase, *“what was lacking from you,”* can also have the meaning, *“your absence.”* What the apostle is referring to here is not so much the fact that Stephanas and his companions presented him with a gift of support on behalf of the Corinthian church; but rather, that these brothers made up for the Corinthian church's absence by representing them and renewing their contact with the Apostle Paul.

Paul had a tremendously deep Christ-like love for and affinity with his fellow believers in Christ. The renewed contact and fellowship with the Corinthian church through their representatives (Stephanas and his companions) was a source of spiritual refreshment to Paul; it was uplifting to his soul and spirit. Conversely, when Stephanas conveys to the Corinthians Paul's love and concern

for them (verses 23-24,) it will be a source of spiritual refreshment to the church as well.

In verses 19-20 Paul informs the Corinthian congregation of the loving greetings sent to them from their fellow Christians in the province of Asia. The great majority of these Christians had probably never met the Corinthians personally, yet they express their love for them in Christ Jesus. They had a loving affinity for these Corinthian Christians because their mutual relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ, as expressed in 1 Corinthians 1:2, was a genuine and vital aspect of their Christian experience: *“to the church of God that is in Corinth—to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be saints together with all those everywhere who call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, (he is both their Lord and ours.)”*

What a contrast this expression of Christian love was to the attitude displayed by many of these Corinthian Christians who tended to sinfully view themselves as spiritually superior to their brothers in Christ and held themselves aloof from them. The Apostle Paul found it necessary to rebuke them for that sinful attitude by inquiring, *“What makes you superior? And what do you have that you did not receive? But if you received it, why do you boast as if it had not been given to you?”* (1 Cor. 4:7.) While maintaining the integrity of Christ’s word, we must also make every effort to maintain the spiritual unity created by His Holy Spirit: *“give diligence to maintain the unity of the Spirit by means of the bond of peace”* (Eph. 4:3.)

In response to these Christian greetings, expressed by the churches in the province of Asia, Paul calls upon the Corinthian Christians to *“greet one another with a holy kiss.”* That is to say, the apostle is urging the Corinthians to communicate to one another the affection expressed for them by their fellow Christians from the province of Asia; and in so doing, to renew and re-affirm their own Christian affection for one another.

Following the warm Christian greetings from the churches in the province of Asia and from Paul himself, in verse 22 there comes this striking word: *“If anyone does not love the Lord, let him be under the curse of God.”* Paul has lovingly and earnestly ministered to the Corinthians with much long-suffering and patience. Now, after all this ministry, if there are still those within the congregation who refuse to accept his apostolic counsel and submit to his apostolic authority, they demonstrate that they do not love the Lord Christ, note John 14:21,24,

*The one who has my commandments and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. The one who loves me shall be loved by my Father, and I will love him, and I will reveal myself to him ... <sup>24</sup>The one who does not love me will not obey my teaching—and the teaching that you hear is not mine, it is from the Father who sent me. (Jn. 14:21,24)*

If these people, who are affiliated with the church, have no love for Christ, they have no abiding place in His church, which is His spiritual body. Verse 22 reminds us that there can only be true Christian fellowship among those who share a genuine Christian faith.

As believers in the Lord Jesus Christ—mutually sharing together in His spiritual resurrection life—let us fulfill our Christian responsibility to be in fellowship with fellow believers. The words of the hymn writer, John Fawcett, should be a living experience in our relationship with one another in Christ:

Blessed be the tie that binds  
Our hearts in Christian love;  
The fellowship of kindred minds  
Is like to that above.

## **Conclusion**

The two brothers mentioned in the Introduction, upon discovering their blood relationship, became more than just passing acquaintances—they became genuinely involved in one another's lives. All the more, as spiritual brothers in Christ our Savior, we must recognize that we are fellow members of His spiritual body and that as such we have responsibilities to one another. By the grace of God, let us seek to fulfill our Christian responsibilities: 1) our responsibility to care for fellow believers in need; 2) our responsibility to respect those who minister to us; and 3) our responsibility to be in fellowship with fellow believers.