

Sunday, November 25, 2018—1 Corinthians 13-16

The season of gift-giving has arrived. Some will give gifts out of habit. Many will give with little satisfaction. Others will give because of the joy of giving and receiving. Inner attitude makes a significant difference

Paul listed the gifts God had given the Corinthian church in chapter 12, but he saw they were competing with one another over the gifts. Which one was better? What was more important? In chapter 13, therefore, he showed them the better way—love. Using any of the gifts without loving one another is a waste of time, an empty endeavor. At the end of time, gifts will cease, but love will remain. Love is the greatest act.

The coming together of God's people, then, should be a combination of love for one another and the use of gifts to build one another up in fellowship and character—knowing one another better and knowing Jesus more intimately. God gave the gifts so the members could perform like an accomplished symphony, a wide variety of notes playing at the same time to produce a rich melody. The conductor gets the praise, the players enjoy the experience (which requires intense preparation and effort), and those watching them are moved by their unity and skill.

Paul began closing his letter by clarifying his teaching on the second-coming of Christ. If there were confusion, he wanted to clear it up. Jesus had died and risen again. Those who trusted in Him would do the same. If there were no resurrection, believers were without hope and a story to tell the world (15:19).

Praise God for the gift of Jesus, the gifts empowered by the Holy Spirit, and the gift of hope and power from the resurrection.

Saturday, November 24, 2018—1 Corinthians 9-12

Parents know the delicate process of expressing joy in their children while being honest about their shortcomings. Every child needs encouragement, but every child also needs accountability. Paul walked this fine line with the Corinthians, pointing out their sinful actions but admitting they were his seal of apostleship (9:2). He saw God at work in them.

He told them he could have taken support from them, but he chose not to do so. It was right for those who preach the gospel to earn their living that way (9:14), but he didn't take advantage of that. He was self-supporting. "What then is my reward? To preach the gospel and offer it free of charge and not make full use of my rights in the gospel" (9:18)

He wasn't relying on them for support, so he could be brutally honest with them—wanting their sanctification, not their salary. He urged them to heed the example of Old Testament ancestors and not desire evil things (10:6). Any temptation they faced had been faced before (10:13). God would provide a way out so they could flee idolatry (10:14). In whatever they did they were to do everything for the glory of God (10:31).

With the right attitude before Christ, they would solve relationship problems in the home and church (11:1-34). They would serve one another through their gifts. ". . . so that there would be no division in the body, but that the members would have the same concern for each other" (12:25).

Pray for your church to grow in holiness and service through gifts.

Friday, November 23, 2018—1 Corinthians 5-8

In the weeks leading up to Christmas, people tend to make lists. Parents make lists for gifts and groceries. Kids write down what they're dreaming they'll see on Christmas morning. The lists are exciting.

Paul had a list of things to address with the Corinthians, and they were grievous, serious matters. He thanked God for his relationship with these believers, but he suffered because of their immaturity and immorality.

They were celebrating sin in their congregation even pagans didn't commit. A little yeast affects the entire lump, he reminded them (5:6). They needed to take their holiness seriously. "God judges outsiders. Remove the evil person from among you" (5:13). At the same time, they needed to understand one another. Coming from different backgrounds meant coming to consensus on certain non-essentials. "Keeping God's

commands is what matters” (7:19). “But be careful that this right of yours in no way becomes a stumbling block for the weak” (8:8-9).

While holding one another accountable, they needed to deepen their love for one another. Some were taking others to court instead of settling the matter internally. “Is there not a wise person among you who can arbitrate?” Paul asked (6:5). They were damaging their fellowship and ruining their witness to a watching world.

Sinful lifestyles were the past of many whom Jesus had sanctified (6:11). Paul urged them to flee sexual immorality. The body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, so believers honor God with how they use and treat their bodies (6:18-20).

Pray for holiness in your personal walk and your church.

Thursday, November 22, 2018—1 Corinthians 1-4

The fourth Thursday of November is Thanksgiving Day in America, a time for family and friends to gather and remember the good things for which they can express gratitude. November 22 is a day of remembrance and mourning, the day President John F. Kennedy was shot in Dallas, Texas. A similar mixture of gratitude and remorse likely stirred Paul to write to the Corinthians. There was much in them for which he gave thanks, yet there were serious issues of immaturity to address.

One of the great issues facing the Corinthian church was division. Some were lining up behind Paul. Others, Peter or Apollos. Paul reminded them their boasting was in Jesus Christ alone (1:31). He was the One who brought life from death. He was the only One who deserved allegiance.

Paul had exalted Christ so that the people would believe in Jesus, not in some persuasive logic. The Greek world prized those powerful philosophies, yet Paul knew there was something greater in simply proclaiming Jesus. The struggle Paul encountered was their receiving the powerful gospel because of their immaturity. Without putting aside their immaturity, they would struggle to know Christ in His fullness (3:1-4).

Paul wanted them to see themselves as servants of Christ and managers of the mystery of God (4:1). Paul urged them to imitate him (4:16) in order to know how to

fulfill that calling. Praise God today for those who set the example of being a servant and manager in your life.

Wednesday, November 21, 2018—2 Thessalonians 1-3, Acts 18:12-19:10

Paul never promised walking with Jesus would be easy. His personal life was filled with examples of struggle, and he wrote honestly about the struggles others would face. In his second letter to the Thessalonians, he addressed some of the same issues he discussed in his first letter. When we walk with Jesus, knowing the truth doesn't make difficulties go away. We need continual reminders of our victory.

He promised the readers God would bring justice "since it is just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you and to give relief to you who are afflicted, along with us. This will take place at the revelation of the Lord Jesus from heaven with his powerful angels" (1:6-7). They would have to wait, but the certainty of justice would give them endurance.

They were suffering because of their faithfulness to Christ and also because of false teachers. Paul urged them not to believe reports of Jesus' already having returned. They were to remember what Paul taught. Satan is deceptive, and those who follow him will believe and promote lies. Paul prayed, "May the Lord direct your heart to God's love and Christ's endurance" (3:5). Then, he urged them to be active. Waiting on Jesus' return was no excuse not to live faithfully and fruitfully in the present. Paul urged them to stay away from the idle (3:6,14) and remember that he who isn't willing to work should not eat (3:11).

Praise God for His promise of eternal justice and daily presence.

Tuesday, November 20, 2018—1 Thessalonians 1-5

During his second missionary journey, Paul traveled through Thessalonica (Acts 17:1-9) and established a church there. Not long after his time with them, he heard they were struggling with doctrinal issues, so he wrote a letter to them to address the truth and encourage their walk.

He first affirmed the indisputable reality of their conversion. Like every other believer, the Thessalonians had received the Holy Spirit (1:5), and He had demonstrated Himself among them in power. Paul then recounted the hardships they endured together. Their faith and fellowship were as genuine as any other church. In fact, Paul said the Thessalonian church was his hope, joy, and crown of boasting before Jesus (2:19).

As much as Paul wanted to return to Thessalonica, he continually faced roadblocks, so he sent Timothy, who returned with glowing words about their faith and steadfastness (3:1-10). Paul urged them to continue, despite their continual hardships, in their pursuit of holiness, the very will of God for their lives (4:3). He also addressed their greatest concern, the reason for writing the letter. Jesus had not returned, as some had tried to make them believe. His return would be unmistakable. Until then, those who died in Christ would be safe with Him (4:13-18).

Paul closed by urging them to encourage their leaders and to work toward building up one another. God had not appointed them to wrath but to obtain salvation (5:9), so he wanted them to live in that joy, thanksgiving, and intentionality toward holiness. Pray the same for yourself today.

Monday, November 19, 2018—Acts 15:1-18:11

Few people enjoy church business meetings, yet they have been an important part of church life throughout the church's history. In fact, some might say Acts 15 represents the first church business meeting. James and Paul discussed the balance of faith and works in the life of a fully-developing disciple, and the leaders of the church in Jerusalem discussed the topic with leaders from the church in Antioch in Acts 15.

Both Peter and Paul spoke of the reality of God's gift of the Spirit in Jews and Gentiles alike. The evidence was clear that people from any culture could become believers by placing their faith in Christ. Their daily practice, however, might be different according to culture, so the Jerusalem church offered some advice for how Gentiles might conduct themselves. The Spirit of God brought peace in a tense situation.

Paul and Barnabas could not find the same level of concession, so they parted ways and continued their missionary journeys. As before, God replicated in Paul what He had done for Peter, this time freeing Paul and Silas from prison chains through angelic intervention. Despite hardship, Paul continued to preach repentance (17:30), and he shared with Jews and Gentiles alike so that as many as possible would hear the truth.

The words with which God encouraged Paul are useful for contemporary disciples. “Don’t be afraid, but keep on speaking and don’t be silent. For I am with you . . .” (18:9-10a). Praise God for the community of believers and the power of the gospel.