

Chapter 16 needs to be read in continuity with chapter 15. There is not a break in Paul's thinking despite the appearance of an anticlimax. Because death has been swallowed up in victory (15:54-57), there is reason and purpose to be involved in ministry (15:58). Chapter 16 is exactly that. It is ministry and a very practical illustration of what Paul means when he tells the Corinthians to give themselves fully to the work of the Lord.

An accusation of being too heavenly minded to be any earthly good would never stick to Paul. Because he looked heavenward and to the future, he kept his feet solidly on the ground. Chapter 16:1-11 touches on three areas in which Paul had his feet on the ground and from which we can learn valuable lessons.

I. Finances & giving: the collection to help believers in Jerusalem (16:1-4)

The situation : Poverty was one of many common social evils but a special problem for Christians in Jerusalem, probably because of the persecution there. The need was beyond the resources of the church in Jerusalem, though they attempted to help (Acts 4:32-35), so they had asked of Paul that he remember the poor when working among the Gentiles (Gal. 2:10).

The collection of 1 Cor 16:1 was arranged by Paul to be made among the churches (e.g., in Galatia, Macedonia and Achaia) and sent to Jerusalem. Cf. 2 Corinthians 8-9. He especially addresses the manner in which the collection was to take place from which we can gain some important lessons.

Lessons connected to this area

1. There is a priority to our responsibility to help the poor. Cf. Galatians 6:10. Although help is not limited exclusively to believers, there is a priority to help fellow believers.
2. Giving is for every believer. "Each one" was to respond. It is not limited to the rich or the spiritually gifted.
3. Giving is to be regular and systematic. On Sundays, i.e., once per week (regularity), the Corinthians were to set aside something from their income and save it (systematic). This avoids emotional appeals or giving as an after-thought.
4. Giving is to be proportional to income, i.e., as the person prospers. Paul does not use the term "tithe" here or elsewhere. Giving "as one prospers" is much more flexible and may actually go beyond simple percentage based giving. The more a person prospers the higher the percentage one can give.
5. Handling finances should be done in a way to remove any opportunity or impression of mishandling. The churches were to select their own men to carry the gift to Jerusalem.

II. Time & planning: Paul's plans to visit the Corinthian believers (16:5-9)

The situation: Although we know from 2 Corinthians that Paul's plans had already changed or would change after this letter, he here tells the Corinthians of his desire to stay at Ephesus until Pentecost, then spend the summer in evangelizing in Macedonia, then finally to come to Corinth and winter there, which would give him a longer time with them.

Lessons

1. It is good to communicate plans to those who will be affected by them. Paul may have been concerned that the Corinthians might feel that he was purposefully neglecting or avoiding them. Communicating is a sign of good faith, an act of consideration.
2. Evaluate accurately and generously the amount of time which may truly be needed. Paul knew that a short visit would not be satisfactory, though short visits were typical of his missionary practice (Ephesus and Corinth being the exceptions).
3. All planning must be with the understanding "if the Lord permits." Cf. James 4:15. We plan but it is God who directs.
4. Open doors do not mean a lack of opposition. Some even suggest that Paul understood opposition to be a sign that his work was vital and worth continuing. (However, an "open door" is not an absolute sign of God's leading. Cf. 2 Corinthians 2:12-13.

III. People & leadership: preparing for Timothy's visit to Corinth (15:10-11)

The situation: Timothy was being sent by Paul to Corinth (1 Cor 4:17) via Macedonia (Acts 19:22). Paul showed some concern for the reception which Timothy might receive in Corinth. Although perhaps a rebuke of the church, it probably had more to do with the personality of Timothy who tended to be timid and self-deprecating (cf. 1 Timothy 4:12 and 2 Timothy 1:7-8; 2:1). Without Paul's boldness and tough skin, working with the Corinthians could be challenging.

Lessons

1. Leading people takes into account their personalities and the corresponding needs. Paul sought to help in the reception of Timothy.
2. Differences in personality do not mean that someone is doing the work of the Lord any less than we are. Paul rated Timothy's ministry with his own (15:11) and did not devalue it because Timothy was timid.
3. In leading people we should give allowance for the unexpected to happen. Despite clear plans (cf. 4:17) he wrote "if Timothy comes." We need as well to allow for the unexpected for us and for others.

Paul was practical, with "his feet solidly on the ground". He illustrates the principle he set out in 15:57-58. Having been given victory over death through the Lord Jesus Christ, we are to always give ourselves fully to the work of the Lord. Although this victory is fully realized in the future, we live today in its light with full commitment, wisely, living to please Christ.