

Lake Cities Community Church
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Pastor Craig Schill
Sermon Series: 1 Corinthians

“Paul’s Final Plea for Unity”
1 Cor 16

At the State Fair of Texas there is an annual exhibit called the Greenhouse on the Midway. Amid the noise and heat of the fair, this is an oasis, full of beautiful plants and flowers. Many come there to see the model train that crisscrosses through the room – it is really one of our family’s favorite places at the fair. Well, last year they had a sign in the garden that I found really interesting, so I took a picture of it – it was a quote by Albert Einstein: “If the bee disappeared off the surface of the globe, then man would have only four years of life left.”

I thought that was fascinating – that my existence may survive cancer or tornados or war, but be snuffed out by a lack of bees. A quick Google search showed me that there may be some merit to this - many books and articles have been published. One study found that from “1971 to 2006 approximately one half of the US honey bee colonies have vanished.” And if bees are not there to pollinate the flowers – then the crops of the world could fail, leading to livestock starving and eventually...

... Einstein may have been right! The point, though, that I am trying to make is this: *We are all connected – we are all interdependent.* That is the way God made our world. Our own life may depend on things that we have never even thought about – like bees. And that principle of *connectedness* is nowhere more true than in the church. We as a church do not

exist in a vacuum. We are part of a larger movement – that has come before us and will continue after us – and we are dependent and inter-dependent on so many other factors, besides what goes on our calendar, in our little world. And this becomes Paul’s focus as he finishes the book of 1 Corinthians.

Turn with me to 1 Corinthians chapter 16. The problem was that the Corinthian church was so arrogant and proud, that they operated as if they were the only ones who mattered. As Paul concludes his letter he is making one last plea for unity – by reminding them that they are connected in so many ways with other people.

Paul focuses on three things. First, on the global community – the church around the world, and how that can bring unity. Second he discusses their least favorite subject - leadership and authority structures, and how no unity is possible apart from them. Finally he ends with a personal call to love one another.

Unity with the global church (1-4, 5-9, 19)

Let’s start with Paul’s global focus – because unlike the first 15 chapters - in chapter 16 Paul takes us all over the known world - referencing the following other congregations. For example, Paul is going to mention the church in Jerusalem; the churches in Galatia which would have included Antioch of Pisidia, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe. He references the churches in Macedonia, which would include Philippi, Thessalonica and Berea; and the churches in Asia which would include Colossae, Miletus, Hierapolis, Troas, and Ephesus.

Paul compels the Corinthians to look up and look around and see that they are part of something much larger than themselves. He begins in verse one: **1Cor. 16:1 Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I directed the churches of Galatia, so do you also.** Jerusalem has been through a horrible famine, and during his 3rd missionary journey Paul

took up a collection from many churches. He has apparently already given the Corinthians background on the collection – but notice he refers to the churches of Galatia. The Corinthians are part of a global community. Paul is building a larger vision for them as to what God is doing in the world.

Paul's spells out his method for the offering: [1Cor. 16:2](#) *On the first day of every week each one of you is to put aside and save, as he may prosper, so that no collections be made when I come.* Over a period of time the money is set aside, on the first day of the week, and the amount is to be commensurate with a family's income. With this weekly system the money grows over time... and then when Paul comes the money already saved is merely brought together. Next the details of the delivery are given.

[1Cor. 16:3](#) *When I arrive, whomever you may approve, I will send them with letters to carry your gift to Jerusalem; [1Cor. 16:4](#) and if it is fitting for me to go also, they will go with me.*

This is beautiful. Think of the unity that will occur as representatives from the Corinthian church are sent out on their own short-term mission's trip. Perhaps they join with other neighboring churches – and together they bring tangible help to the suffering saints in Jerusalem. What a reception they would receive there – the gratitude, prayers and songs. The friendships forged. And when then they returned to Corinth – *they would never look at the church the same way again!* One of my commentaries put it this way: "Paul undoubtedly saw the collection as an opportunity to bring greater unity within the church across Jewish and Gentile boundaries." – Craig Blomberg, 1 Corinthians, page 323.

Paul continues his global theme in verse five: [1Cor. 16:5](#) *But I will come to you after I go through Macedonia, for I am going through Macedonia. [1Cor. 16:6](#) and perhaps I will*

stay with you, or even spend the winter, so that you may send me on my way wherever I may go. [1Cor. 16:7](#) For I do not wish to see you now *just* in passing; for I hope to remain with you for some time, if the Lord permits. Notice Paul's focus here is on Macedonia – before he comes to them he is going to see how the brothers and sisters are at Philippi and Thessalonica. Because of Paul's global responsibilities, the Corinthians might need to wait a while for him to arrive and minister to them. Teaching them patience and deference to the needs of others.

And before he gets to Macedonia, there is work in Asia, verse eight: [1Cor. 16:8](#) But I will remain in Ephesus until Pentecost; [1Cor. 16:9](#) for a wide door for effective *service* has opened to me, and there are many adversaries. Ephesus is in Asia Minor – this is where Paul was as he wrote the letter. They need his assistance as well. Again, Paul is painting a bigger picture for the self-focused Corinthians.

Jump to verse 19: [1Cor. 16:19](#) The churches of Asia greet you. Aquila and Priscilla greet you heartily in the Lord, with the church that is in their house.

Do you see what Paul is doing? If they can understand that they are not the only game in town – that will in itself encourage unity and peace in their fellowship. Often when we see the bigger picture – the little squabbles are put into perspective and we are called to sacrifice something of ourselves to help achieve the larger goal. Let me try to illustrate this.

Last week we had a pastor from India visit our church and give greeting, and we took up a collection for him, which he immediately wired the next day to his church in India to pay the bills. What a great reminder of God's global work, and I believe it pleased the Lord that we sacrificed part of our service and some of our money to help him on his way,

just as the Corinthians were to help the Jerusalem believers in their suffering and also to Timothy and Paul on their way.

This week, our attendance is down, because a great number of our church are on a mission's trip to strengthen the Native American church in Colorado through the Christian Discipleship Center. We sacrifice here to strengthen the church there.

In other words, an important focus of our church is our fourth purpose **Sharing the Good News** which means that we pray and partner with other congregations and the global movement of God. This is vital for us to be a healthy unified church – that we all embrace this calling. We are currently praying and giving for churches in Germany, Liberia, Japan, Pakistan and India, and for local ministry in Colorado and other places as well.

Unity with church leadership (10-12, 15-18)

A healthy church has a global perspective – this actually helps bring unity and peace as we see what God is doing around the world, Now (second) Paul brings the focus a little closer to home, by reminding the Corinthians that they must respect the leadership and authority God has put over them.

In our passage - Paul has just said that because of global concerns, he may be delayed in coming to them, but he has already sent Timothy (see 4:7). Now all the problems of the Corinthians and how they treat people come to mind, and Paul worries for his disciple:

1Cor. 16:10 Now if Timothy comes, see that he is with you without cause to be afraid, for he is doing the Lord's work, as I also am. 1Cor. 16:11 So let no one despise him. But send him on his way in peace, so that he may come to me; for I expect him with the

brethren. Timothy is a pastor with a sensitive spirit and Paul is afraid that the Corinthians will **chew him up and spit him out**. So Paul warns them to not give him cause for to be afraid, and not to despise him. In other words – this is a church that *has the capacity* to cause leadership to tremble and holds leadership with contempt.

He continues on this leadership theme with verse 12: **1Cor. 16:12 But concerning Apollos our brother, I encouraged him greatly to come to you with the brethren; and it was not at all his desire to come now, but he will come when he has opportunity.** You will recall that the Corinthians pitted Paul against Apollos in chapter one. Paul here shows unity with Apollos, encouraging him to come and strengthen the Corinthian church. He is modeling unity in leadership for them. Now why does Apollos not want to come? Of course we don't know, but perhaps Apollos was a little worn down by the Corinthians. This was a church continually fighting and bickering – especially against their leaders! And so Paul seeks to encourage Apollos.

Paul continues again with his call to unity with church leadership, verse 15: **1Cor. 16:15 Now I urge you, brethren (you know the household of Stephanas, that they were the first fruits of Achaia, and that they have devoted themselves for ministry to the saints), 1Cor. 16:16 that you also be in subjection to such men and to everyone who helps in the work and labors.**

In all these examples, Paul is teaching that church unity and health is only possible if church members submit to church leadership. Notice that Paul is careful to indicate that Stephanas is a man worthy of their trust – we don't blindly follow any spiritual leader who claims spiritual authority – but we discern (like Paul does) whether they are godly and

worthy of our voluntary submission. Stephanas is a man who is devoted to the church, who loves the people and to such men Paul says to submit.

The implication is that the people were not submitting to this godly leader in the church. Why? This is speculation, but perhaps because he was not famous like Apollos, Cephas and Paul – the Corinthians liked their Christian celebrities. Second, remember that the Corinthians generally despised authority and structure over them. Paul begins his letter with their division over church leadership, and it is not insignificant that he ends his letter with the same theme.

If the church is to have unity with one another – they first must come to grips with their leadership, for godly leaders are absolutely essential for the church to be healthy as Paul literally gushes: [1Cor. 16:17](#) I rejoice over the coming of Stephanas and Fortunatus and Achaicus, because they have supplied what was lacking on your part. [1Cor. 16:18](#) For they have refreshed my spirit and yours. Therefore acknowledge such men.

Unity with one another

Look around at the global movement of God – and let that seep into the church as it creates opportunities for unity. Next – submit to the godly leaders in your midst – let them come and lead with your prayers and thanksgiving. Don't give them reason to fear you, don't despise them. Now, third and lastly, Paul gets right into their personal lives, to call for unity with one another.

[1Cor. 16:13](#) Be on the alert, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong.

[1C. 16:14](#) Let all that you do be done in love. Paul hits them with five imperatives. The first four, to be alert and on guard, to stand firm in the faith, to act like men and to be strong are

probably commands to stay strong in the faith, and not leave orthodox teaching, as they were enamored with worldly wisdom and false teachers abounded.

But, Paul says, never, never, never forget the fifth imperative; that everything must be done in love. We have learned over and over again in this letter that love is the controlling value of the church – God has loved us so that we can love one another.

Paul continues, [1Cor. 16:20](#) All the brethren greet you. Greet one another with a holy kiss. Let me just Pause here to say a word about the holy kiss, because even in our culture a kiss on the cheek in some quarters is a sign of unity and affection!

My German dance club is a kiss on the cheek type club. Mostly older German folk, for whom that I think is very normal. Also, when I was in India and we stopped by the orphanage one last time – the 85 children were all there to say good bye to my Dad and I and to pray for us and sing us songs. One little cute girl – maybe 10 years old - came up to me with tears in her eyes that I was leaving, and I was so moved emotionally, that I threw cultural restraint to the wind and I kissed her on the cheek – and that simple act caused some kind of ice to be broken – all the girls came and wanted a kiss on the cheek. I will never forget that as long as I live. The closeness and bond that was formed.

Here is the larger principle – “Appropriate physical closeness in the church – whether a kiss or a hug or a handshake does much to reflect and affirm relational unity and closeness.”

I think we are a pretty good hugging church, and that is something I would like to encourage in. This week I read that: “A study by University of North Carolina researchers found that hugs increase the “bonding” hormone oxytocin and decrease the risk of heart

disease. Meanwhile, levels of the stress hormone cortisol decreased." "This study has reinforced research findings that...a hug from a loved one, can have beneficial effects on heart health," said Dr. Charmaine Griffiths, spokesperson for the British Heart Foundation.

Before scientific studies, Paul knew that appropriate physical touch has beneficial effects on the heart – the heart of a person and the heart of a church!

Paul continues with the importance of love: [1Cor. 16:21](#) The greeting is in my own hand—Paul. [1Cor. 16:22](#) If anyone does not love the Lord, he is to be accursed. Maranatha. I just love Paul – he was not one to mince words - loving one another is so important and if you are not on board with that - “Let you be cursed by God” – *Anathama* is the Greek word. But in the same breath *maranatha* (come Lord Jesus). The two similar Greek words are next to one another – anathema / maranatha - it is a play on words. PLEASE love one another and PLEASE Lord Jesus come back soon!

Paul ends: [1Cor. 16:23](#) The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you. [1Cor. 16:24](#) My love be with you all in Christ Jesus. Amen.

Unity at the global level. Unity with church leadership, and finally unity through love for one another in the local church. Let me make a few points of very practical **application** for us this morning as we end.

With respect to being global Christians – we really could use **one more person on our Sharing Team**. With Kevin and Laura leaving – another person or couple would be a great encouragement. And today we have seen that our interaction with the church out there – not only benefits them, but bring blessing and unity to us. This has been a major

focus of our text – and so let's commit to strengthening our own commitment to God's global work in the world.

With respect to church leadership – **please pray and encourage your elders.**

Because we need it – shepherding a church is not easy work. Today Allen and Micah are both not here, and so let me affirm to you what most of you know- that like Stephanas, they are men worthy of your submission. They love the Lord and are devoted to you, more than you know. We, together as your elders, covet your prayers.

Finally – we end with this – **love one another** – If love guides our ways we will become the church God's wants us to be – putting away foolish behavior and attitudes – growing in maturity and building up one another in Christlikeness. Oh - one more – **hug one another.** Go ahead, get up and hug a person around you, as Jon Leines comes forward to lead us to the Lord's Table.