

“The Tapas Chapter” // 1

Corinthians 16:1–24 // *Cutting Through the Noise* # 18

(Prayer Time for Easter)

Remain standing as we take some time to pray for Easter...

1. Pray
2. Well, like we just did, prayer is arguably the most important thing we can do in anticipation for Easter. We often say that prayer is first, second and third on our action list for any event. So **beginning tomorrow** we will be having a week of prayer leading up to Easter Sunday. You can sign-up for daily prayer prompts right on our website.
3. And for any of you who are totally clueless and like, “Whoa, Easter is next week?” That’s perfectly fine. You can still grab your ticket and you can still invite others!
4. I know as we head into next Sunday you probably have a *lot* of questions, so, as you go ahead and take a seat, and check this out; it should tell you what you need to know...

[\(Video: *What to Expect for Easter*\)](#)

(Introduction)

1 Corinthians 16, if you have your Bible.¹ This week we are coming in for the landing in our study of 1 Corinthians. What a ride, right? It’s been bumpy at times. But as my pilot friends like to say, the best landing is “one you can walk away from.” So, let’s aim for that today.

(I know it is Palm Sunday and traditionally we’d spend some time looking at the events around the cross, but I needed to finish this book because we’re starting something new at Easter). I had 2 voices in my head: the traditional people who really want a Palm Sunday message on Palm Sunday, and the OCD people who would literally implode if I never finished this book. And the OCD voices prevailed).

Just as a reminder of where we’ve been-- Paul’s letter to the Corinthians is divided into 5 major sections, based on questions the Corinthians have asked him or problems he’s heard they’re having. In section 1, Paul addressed:

1. Divisions in the church (chapters 1 – 4);
2. Questions surrounding sex and singleness (5 – 7);
3. How to navigate controversies in the church that threaten to throw us off mission (8 – 10)
4. In part 4, Paul addressed Corporate worship wars (11 – 14): the role of women in leadership and the problem of cliques in church

¹ Works Consulted: Wilson, Andrew. *1 Corinthians For You: Thrilling You With How Grace Changes Lives*, The Good Book Company; John Mark Comer, “First Corinthians: Shotguns + Salutations,” sermon preached at Bridgetown Church on August 21, 2011; David Platt, “12 Traits of a Biblical Church: Giving,” sermon preached at McLean Bible Church on April 15, 2018; Mike Kelsey, “Living in Light of Eternity, Part 3 - Giving and the Local Church,” sermon preached at McLean Bible Church on August 22, 2021. Kenneth L. Barker and John R. Kohlenberger III. *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: New Testament. Abridged Edition*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994); John MacArthur, “[Doing the Lord’s Work in the Lord’s Way, Part 1](#),” sermon preached at Grace Community Church on November 20, 1977; Henry Blackaby, *Experiencing God*.

and confusion about spiritual gifts and speaking in tongues and fun stuff like that.

5. In part 5, Paul addressed **Objections to the resurrection**, and now, 1 Cor 16, we have Paul's concluding thoughts.

This is an unusual chapter--**in fact, I've entitled it, "The Tapas Chapter,"** because that's what this chapter feels like--You know how at a Tapas restaurant you get a little bit of a bunch of dishes rather than a lot of any one dish? First time I ever remember going to a Tapas restaurant I had just become pastor here and I took a 2-day study retreat down at the beach... I wanted to go out to dinner. Now, Veronica and my budget was really tight at the time, so I go up to this restaurant and it says "Tapas," and I don't know what that means. I'm from Yadkinville--the closest thing we have to Tapas is Golden Corral where you can get a little bit of everything on the buffet line--anyway, I look at the menu posted outside the door and the prices look really reasonable: flank steak: \$9. Red Snapper: \$11." I thought, "This is great." Of course, I remember when they brought the first dish, it was like 3 little slivers of prime rib, and I was like, "Is this a joke?" But by that point I was in, and didn't want to be embarrassed in front of the waitress. So, something like \$92 later, I walked out, and still stopped by Bojangles on the way home because I was hungry.

Well, this chapter is theological tapas. We're going to get just a taste of a bunch of different subjects. It's like 6 different mini-sermons. My other theory is that when Paul got done writing 1 Cor 15, he had like this much left on the parchment, but he still had a few more things to say, and he doesn't want to waste a whole new sheet of parchment because that stuff is expensive--supply chain issues and war in Ukraine and whatnot, so he's like, "Let me try to cram everything else I want to say into this little section..." So, that's my other theory.

On a serious note, I actually love passages like this one, because in them you get a glimpse of life in the early church. Paul is not so much teaching, *per se*, as is taking care of a few housekeeping items. And **sometimes you can learn as much from someone by watching their life as you do from what they teach.** Here, we get a glimpse into what's going through Paul's head, and there's a lot we can learn from that.

First: 16:1 Now about the collection for the saints: Do the same as I instructed the Galatian churches. 2 On the first day of the week, each of you is to set something aside and save in keeping with how he is prospering, so that no collections will need to be made when I come.

Paul urges them to set money aside weekly for an offering. It's in response to a need: a terrible famine is taking place in Jerusalem and a lot of the believers there are starving. There's several things you can learn about giving just from what Paul says in those 2 verses.

First, 1. Who should be giving? The answer is, "All of us." Notice vs. 2, Paul says, **"each of you is to set something aside..."** We know there were poor people in the Corinthian church--remember Paul has a whole section in Corinthians rebuking the rich people for snobbishly separating themselves from the poor--so, when Paul says "each" of you he is specifically saying, "all of you, not just the rich."

Giving is a test of faith and commitment for EVERY Christian. The question is do you love and trust God enough to give him your first and best? The issue in giving is not how much your gift changes the bottom line but the place that Jesus holds in your heart. Every Christian should give to God their first and best.

I heard about a pastor in Bangladesh who pastored a really poor nomadic community there, and they didn't really even use money in that community. So, he taught each family to set aside some of their allocation of rice for the week--10% into a jar--and then every week give that jar to the church to take care of the pastor and his family and so that the church could bless the poor. **So, who gives? Each of us.**

Second question: 2. When should we give? The answer is 'regularly.' Paul says, "On the first day of the week..." The point here is regularity and recurrence. Paul is saying, "Don't be an impulse giver." Don't wait for a giving campaign or for some big need that plays on your heart strings and makes you throw your lunch money into the plate. That's not biblical giving, that's emotionally manipulated giving. Build generosity into your budget. My family does this--it's literally our first bill. I have it set up so that it comes out of my account as soon as my paycheck hits. I've taught my kids to do it through a jar system since they were kids: God, save, spend.

Third: 3. Where should we give? Paul encourages them to give it to their local church, because that is Jesus' hub of ministry--from the church they can take care of the poor, support evangelism and church planting. We teach that the bulk of your giving ought to be to the local church. And I realize that might seem self-seeking since I work for the church, but I say that not because I'm a pastor, but because that's honestly what I see the New Testament teaches. The local church is the hub of ministry, like we see here in 1 Corinthians. We here at the church also have the bandwidth to vet mission and mercy-work opportunities to know which ones are the best investments, so we can take the money that you give and distribute it wisely.

Now, of course, that doesn't mean you can only give to the local church. My wife and I give to several things outside of the local church, but the biggest portion of our giving--at least the first 10% of all that we make, and usually a lot more beyond that--goes to our local church.

Fourth question: 4. How much should we give? This is what everyone always wants to know. They ask me like I'm allowed to give out gold stars and God's behalf and they want to know what they have to give to be a gold-star-giver. To be *summa cum laude* as a Christian. Well, bad news for you type-A gold-star pursuers; there's no rigidly fixed amount. I preached a whole message in November explaining the concept of the firstfruits--the basic idea is that throughout the Bible God tells us that we should honor him with the firstfruits of all that he gives to us, and 10% is the general starting point for that. That's literally what the word 'tithe' means--the first 10%.

But here's the thing: the tithe was not the only offering commanded in the Old Testament. In Deuteronomy 14, for example, God commanded that every third year another tithe be taken, this time off of your total assets, and given to the Temple to be distributed exclusively to the poor, the widow, or the refugee. And then the Old Testament also talks about "freewill offerings," which is just when a special need arises--could be a poverty need, or a building they wanted to build, or a mission they wanted to fund-- and God people gave voluntarily whatever was in their heart, beyond their tithes and firstfruits.²

² "When you read the Old Testament, in Leviticus 27:30, you see where God commanded that a tithe—that is 10%—of all the production of one's land and flocks should be given to the Lord. Those gifts were used to support the priests and Levites who worked with the temple (Numbers 18:21-24). But then in Deuteronomy 14:22-23, we see another tithe that was taken to

In the New Testament, we find no specific prescriptions for giving, but some pretty impressive *DE-descriptions* of what their giving looked like:

- Acts 2 said it was almost like they held all their property in common, and “there was not a single needy person among them.”
- Luke 19, Zacchaeus was so grateful for God’s grace in his life that he gave away half of his possessions to the poor.
- In Luke 21, a poor widow gives 2 mites to the Temple, which Jesus said represented the bulk of her money.
- In Matthew 26, the forgiven woman broke an alabaster flask of expensive perfume over Jesus’ feet. That was a family heirloom of inestimable value.
- In Acts 5 we see people in the early church selling large tracts of land to support gospel expansion.

So, if you are looking for a specific prescription in the NT about how much to give, you’re not going to find it. That’s got to be a conversation between you and the Holy Spirit. But there is an important phrase in vs. 2 that can help give you guidance: “...each of you is to set something aside... *in keeping with how he is prospering.*” Some of you God has really prospered, and stewardship, for you, means giving far more than a minimum 10%. For you to give

support festivals and celebrations among God’s people. So that was a second tithe, a second 10%. Then when you get to Deuteronomy 14:28-29, every third year another tithe was taken that would be distributed, not just to the Levites, but to the poor, the marginalized, the stranger, the fatherless and the widows. Then the Old Testament also describes “first-fruit offerings” that were given to present the best before God. Basically it was an offering of the best and the first, right off the top. Exodus 23 and 34 talk about giving out of the first annual production of the grain, wine, olive oil and wool. Numbers 15 references giving the first part of any coarse meal as an offering. So that was first-fruit offerings. The Old Testament also talks about “freewill offerings” These were given to offer any excess to God. These were voluntary contributions above and beyond the tithes (plural) and firstfruits (plural). You can read about those in Exodus 35-36 and Deuteronomy 12.” David Platt.

only 10% would almost be a crime. Have you ever asked “why” God blessed you? He does it for a purpose. Scripture says we are always blessed *to be a blessing*. Which means he gave you prosperity so you could share it with the poor and use it to help propel the mission, and it’s wrong before God for you to sit on all that or act like God gave it to you just to bless yourself. As we love to say around here, God prospers his people not so they can simply increase their standard of *living*, but also so they can increase their standard of *giving*. So, for you who are prospering, I doubt 10% is the right amount, because that seems to be the baseline for everybody. And you are someone who has prospered.

The early church fathers give us glimpses into the giving of 1st Christians:

- **Irenaeus** - “The Jews were constrained to a regular payment of tithes. Christians who have liberty assign all their possessions to the Lord, bestowing freely not the lesser portions of their property, because they have the hope of greater things.” The point, he says, is not giving 10% and moving on, but stewarding 100% of what God gave you.
- **Augustine** - “Let every Christian render tithes, and out of the nine parts, let him give alms (which is giving to the poor).” IOW, giving above and beyond the tithe.
- Finally, The **Roman Emperor Julian**, one of the fiercest persecutors of the Christian church, said of the earliest Christians, in disgust: “[The Christian cause] has been specially advanced through their loving service rendered to strangers... It is a scandal that there is not a single one who is a beggar; (they) care not only for their own poor but for ours as well.

So, that's the end of Tapas dish #1. Parents, teach this to your kids: Like I said, we used the jar system. 10/1080. It's a principle I want them to build their lives on.

3 When I arrive, I will send with letters those you recommend to carry your gift to Jerusalem. One thing in this verse I think is worth noticing: It's important to Paul that giving be transparent and accountable. He's saying, "You choose representatives you trust to carry the money so that there is some accountability." Paul doesn't even say, "Turn it all over to me and I'll handle it." We all know stories of religious leaders who abuse money. It's important to us here at TSC that every aspect of our giving be open and accountable. I don't sign any checks here; I don't have any independent authority over our money. All our financials are reviewed by a 3rd party auditor, and there's a group of independent lay-elders who exercise oversight of our entire budget and every dime I spend. **Tapas dish #2.**

Tapas dish #3: In vv. 5–9 Paul lays out his plans for the future. And, at first, it seems a bit rambling and random, but there's **2 things about how Paul describes his plans that I find incredibly helpful.** Check it out: Vs. 5, Paul says, **I will come to you after I pass through Macedonia—6 and perhaps I will remain with you or even spend the winter... 7 I hope to spend some time with you, if the Lord allows. 8 But I will stay in Ephesus until Pentecost, 9 because a wide door for effective ministry has opened for me—yet many oppose me.**

I love **the tentative way Paul talks about his plans:** "I will come to you, I think, maybe spend the winter. I've heard winters are nice there in Corinth. But I might actually skip over to Ephesus first. I'm not really sure. They keep tagging me in their social media posts with important questions, so it might be good to put some face time in there. And honestly, who knows--God has done some weird stuff in my life recently—so I might end up in some other town I haven't even heard of yet."

Here's what I love about that: Paul is an Apostle, and not even he is sure of what God is calling him to do. Some Christians want God to spell out every decision they should make. I will tell you from experience that God rarely does that. He usually gives you a compass that points you in the right direction, but after that, he leads you through open and closed doors in that direction: You are going one way but that door closes--but then another one opens and so you go that way. That kind of flexibility and adjustment doesn't mean you are out of touch with the Spirit. It's how Paul followed God.

In the New Testament, there are **4 Ways God Leads Us:** Write these down

- 1. The Word:** This is the easiest, clearest, and most definitive. For many things, God gives us clear instruction or wisdom from his Word. You don't even have to pray about it. Should I live with my boyfriend? No. Ephesians 5:3. Next question.
- 2. The Church:** As we saw in 1 Cor 12, God gives guidance through members in the church. He empowers others in the body with words of wisdom and insight for you. Or it might just be in giving you general, wise counsel. Proverbs says "In a multitude of counselors there is wisdom." This is the most overlooked part of decision making in a Christian's life. Whenever I am making a big decision, I always consult members of my local body. It's how God has promised to guide me! Y'all, the quickest way to go wrong in life is to do something that troubles the godly counselors in your life. Every major decision and even a lot of minor ones I make with heavy counsel from the church. And it amazes me how many people--good people, either don't do this, or even resist the counsel of what everyone is telling them. Sometimes they don't even ask the question because they don't want to hear different from what they already think. It's arrogant. Loner Christians are

headed for disaster. Listen, y'all: I love **nature shows on Netflix**. And one thing you know if you watch those shows: the wildebeests that get separated from the herd are the ones that are going down. And that's a bunch of you guys. Out there strutting around--I'm doing great by myself. Satan's got you and everybody watching is going to be like, 'Oh...'

3. 3rd way God guides you: **Your spirit (through prayer)**: If you are walking with the Spirit, as you pray, he will often enlarge things in your heart. He grows burdens. Gives vision. Now, you have to balance this one with the others I am giving you. Don't use some internal impulse one as the trump card--make sure what you feel lines up with Scripture and with what your godly counselors are saying, but be sensitive to how the Spirit is leading you in prayer. It's one of his 4 ways of guidance.
4. Finally, **Circumstances**: which is what is happening here with Paul. God just opens and closes doors in front of you. Don't assume that just because it was in your spirit that meant it was from God. The story I always like to tell here is when Veronica and I, after the birth of our 3rd child, were praying about whether to have any more kids. I felt like our quiver was full...

When you have to make a decision, consult these 4--**the Word of God, the counsel of the church, prayer, and then the open and closed doors around you**--and hold all 4 in tension like Paul seems to be doing: *Paul knows what God has put in his heart--that's the direction his compass points. And he's been open to words of prophecy and counsel from people in the church. And now he's watching for open and closed doors as indications of where the Spirit wants him to go.*

One of the most important practical pieces of wisdom I've ever learned on this subject came from Henry Blackaby's *Experiencing God*, a classic Bible study that was really popular 20 years ago. It went like this: **"Look for where God is at work around you and then join him in it."** Look for places around you where God is already working, where he's creating opportunity, growing your passions--and then join him in what he's doing. **Dr. Blackaby shows you that for person after person in the Bible, this is how God guided them.** Look around for where God is at work, ask God to open your eyes to that, and then join him in it.

So, the first thing I find helpful in vv. 5-9 is principles for being guided by the Spirit. The second helpful thing in those verses is tucked in at the end of vs. 9, **"...a wide door for effective ministry has opened for me--yet many oppose me."** *"God has opened a wide door AND many oppose me."* A lot of people assume that difficulty and opposition somehow indicates you are on the wrong path. Listen: Every significant thing I've ever done for God came with A LOT of opposition. You're trying to do the right thing at work but your boss is giving you a hard time. Even threatening to fire you. You're trying to raise your kids the right way and all the other parents are criticizing you. Or you are getting pushback from your family. You share the gospel with someone and they tell you that *you're an arrogant bigot*. You try to do the right thing for the Southern Baptist Convention, and all the keyboard warriors get together and send you an award for **"Worst Christian Leader of 2019."** Vs. 9 might have been the theme verse for my 3 years as SBC President: **"...a wide door for effective ministry has opened for me--yet many oppose me."**

Opposition is not always a sign you're on the wrong path; it's often a sign you're on the right one. After God calls you to something, he

wants to teach you to trust him; he wants to show you that it's his power who accomplishes these things, not your own.

Now, you say, "Well, wait a minute, Pastor! You just said 'closed doors' can be one of the ways God leads you. So, how do you know when opposition and obstacles are God's way of closing a door and when you are supposed to press through them?" Ha. Great question. You have to be in touch with the Spirit (and, seeking counsel from other believers) to discern that. And that's all I've got to say about that.

OK, that's our 3rd or 4th course. Here our waitress comes with our fifth: Vs. 10: I love this verse, too, y'all--If Timothy comes, see that he has nothing to fear while with you, because he is doing the Lord's work, just as I am. How horrible was Timothy's job? Timothy had to take Paul's letter to the Corinthians, where Paul basically punches them in the face--and then, it was customary in those days for the letter deliverer to read the letter out loud to everyone and then answer any questions they had. Paul says to Timothy, "Hey Tim, I've got a job for you. Take this to Corinth and read it to them. And I'd suggest you try not to make eye contact with the guy dating his stepmom when you read that section. And I'd also stand a good distance from those ladies I command to be silent in the church. Be warned--someone might walk on stage and try to smack you. Thanks buddy!"

I do this with our campus pastors sometimes. I get to stand up here and say whatever I want, and then I say, "If you want to ask any questions, ask your campus pastors." Good luck, fellas.

So, Paul says at the end of this letter, "Listen, take it easy on my man Tim. He's literally just the mailman."

13 Be alert, stand firm in the faith, be courageous (some of your translations here say "act like men," btw, which is literally what Paul wrote in Greek--be courageous LIKE MEN. Don't read too much into

that, ladies. He's not saying that only men can be courageous, he's just encouraging a quality normally celebrated among men. Be courageous like the most valiant warrior. Then), be strong . And vs. 14 Do everything in love.

These 5 commands sum up everything Paul's taught in 1 Corinthians.

Be alert: Pay attention! Your enemy is at work around you. He's trying to deceive you. He's at work in the gossiping and pride at work in your heart, and in the sin you tolerate in your midst.

- **Be alert! He's waiting for you, sir, at that computer terminal.** He's got the tools in his arsenal to destroy your marriage. He's lurking for you, looking for a place to sabotage your life.
- **Be alert, sister:** He's waiting for you in that flirtatious glance from that guy at the gym.
- **Be alert, church!** He often masquerades as a teacher of the church, teaching clever things in podcasts and blogs and books while subtly undermining confidence in God's Word. You know that not everyone who publishes books or does podcasts or appears on Oprah and says they speak for Christ actually does.
- **Be alert, church!** Just because a political leader says he or she is your friend, that doesn't mean that he or she is. Our enemy loves to seduce Christians away from dependence on the Holy Spirit and the power of the gospel with offers of alternative, counterfeit forms of power.
- **Be alert, Parents!** There is an enemy after their souls, and you need to pay attention to what your kids are being taught at schools. Listen, I'm not an alarmist--I think I've proven that over 20 years--but increasingly we're seeing what can only be called an agenda pushed with our kids on things like gender and sexuality. If you don't believe me, just look at the recent controversies with the Wake County / Orange County School Board or the discussions going on at Disney or down in Florida. And for goodness sake, don't give your kids unfiltered access to social media, or keep their phones up in their rooms at night, especially in their pre-teen

years. Parents, there are lots of forces out there trying to disciple your kids right now. It's our job to guide that process and protect them, and we can only do that if we're alert. **Be alert!**

Secondly, **Stand firm in the faith!** Ours is a hostile age, and if you are going to hold on to the faith it is going to be a fight, because everything in the world goes the opposite direction. Listen, I love our community, but you know that everything in the world pulls against Christ--business, government, education, entertainment. The world has ALWAYS trends toward self-exaltation, unbelief, and the lusts of the flesh, the lusts of the eyes, and the pride of life. That means if you're not actively fighting to stand firm against that in your family, you're falling. You can't coast uphill. Jesus said you have to fight your way into the Kingdom.

Be courageous! Or, again, **act like men.** Take bold risks for the kingdom. God didn't call us just to huddle up and sing Kum-ba-yay and hang on until he raptures us. He called us to take Jesus to the nations. To see miracles and answers to prayer. Jesus said that through us he would build his church and not even the gates of hell would prevail against us. Gates are not an offensive weapon. Jesus wasn't promising that he would protect us against Satan's attacks, but that he'd make Satan powerless against ours. Be courageous. Don't huddle up in your Christian enclaves and private schools and Christian ghettos. Invite that co-worker to coffee and ask them what you can pray for. Invite that single mom into your family. Take that step to begin the fostering or adoption process. Get involved in our prison ministry, or our refugee-resettlement ministry.

Go on your first mission trip. Better yet, take your family and go with one of our teams to live in a place where Christ's name is not known or heard. **Be courageous--take God's promises seriously.** God has not called us to huddle up and manage a slow retreat while we wait on the rapture, but to storm the gates of hell. **Talk to your campus pastor today about what that looks like.**

The other implication of this command to "be courageous" is to endure. In the KJV I first memorized this verse in, this verse read, **"Quit you like men,"** and the translators translated like that because they recognized in Paul's words a summons to endurance. Men, at their best, don't give up easily; they see things through. They get knocked down, but they get up again, ain't nothing gonna bring them down--I think that's one of the Psalms--they survive and advance and live to fight another day. Paul is saying, "Don't get discouraged when you stumble; don't let failure or setbacks keep you down. Quit you like men." It reminds me of that famous definition of success attributed to **Winston Churchill: "Success is going from failure to failure without losing your enthusiasm."** When you get knocked down, get up and fight another day. *Quit you like men.* The mercies of God will be new tomorrow morning, so you can get up and keep going. Future generations depend on you getting up and fighting again.

Fourth, Be strong! I read this just as a summary of all that he's said up to this point. Christianity is not for the faint of heart. It's a struggle--a fight--against the world, the flesh and the devil. Thankfully, our strength comes from the Holy Spirit. But it's still a fight.

Finally, Do everything in love. The Greeks and Romans would have heartily affirmed the first 4 commands about the virtue of being strong and standing firm. But this last one--do everything in love--this was a distinctly Christian virtue. **Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, and Seneca, in all their voluminous writings on ethics, NEVER list love as a virtue;** that's all Jesus. Paul says love is the most important value of all of them. In fact, 1 Cor 13, Paul told us that the other 4 virtues are worthless if they are not rooted in love.

- **Parents, let's not raise Greco-Roman children,** who are strong and courageous for truth, and know how to write strongly-worded letters to the editor and can give eloquent, angry screeds on talk radio but are not filled with love for their fellow men.

- **You seminary students**--you know you are some of my favorite people at our church, and I'm one of you--but we have a lot of you zealous to fight for truth. But is your life characterized by LOVE for others? Would people describe you as someone zealous for truth or filled with love? Because, without love, you're like a clanging cymbal, Paul says.

OK, we're nearing the end: 17 I am delighted to have Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus present... 18 For they have refreshed my spirit and yours. Give recognition to such people. I love that phrase, "they refresh my spirit." Y'all, I want to grow in this area; I want to refresh people: I want to be like a cool breeze on a hot day. Typically I'm more like a stout punch in the teeth. But I want to be more refreshing. So, pray for me on that.

There's a bunch of people who have been like this for me at our church. Jack and Helen Keegan. Mike and Cris Haglund. Chad Price. Ericka Delong. The Morgans. The Forrest's and Williamson's. The Rudolf's. These are all people who have cared for and refreshed me. And I could mention hundreds more, and that's just with me.

"Give recognition to such people." Here's what I want you to see from this, Summit Church: In every age, God builds his church through ordinary people. Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus are just ordinary people. They don't have books of the Bible named after them, and if Paul hadn't mentioned them here, you would never have heard of them. They just faithfully gave, and prayed, and opened up their houses for hospitality, and spoke early words of refreshment to each other.

And they literally changed the world. And, by the way, they were messed up people, too. Have you picked that up in this letter? These Corinthians are not a neat and tidy bunch. They were fighting and arguing and strutting around like idiots and one dude was dating his step-mom. During award ceremonies one of them walked on stage

and slapped another one of them. Maybe that last one didn't happen but based on what I read in 1 Corinthians, it could have! The point is, these aren't super Christians. If they had Facebook pages, we would have been disgusted by a lot of what we saw. And yet--this group literally transformed the world.

Last week I had the privilege to visit Rome, where I filmed a Bible study through the book of Romans, on location, for a group called *Right Now Media*. RNM, by the way, is a massive collection of some of the best Bible studies and parenting studies and marriage studies and family stuff and anything else you can think of by some of the best Christian teachers in the world. It's like Netflix for Christians. And, this might be the best kept secret at the church, but you have a free membership to this by virtue of the fact that you are a member here at Summit. All you need to do is go to summitchurch.com/rightnowmedia and you can access the entire library.

But the reason I bring this up is that being on location in Rome and filming all this teaching through Romans while standing at places like the Colosseum, or in the very cell Nero kept Paul in before executing him, was amazing. You can't escape that somehow a group of disorganized, rag-tag, blue collar, backwoods people transformed an Empire. Rome was a place of incredible power: the ruins that have survived 2000 years point to this incredible civilization. And, yet, in less than 300 years the whole Empire had turned its back on its heritage and converted to Christianity. Today that would be like a group of uneducated Bedouin nomads outside of Baghdad starting a new religion that within 300 years most of America and Europe embraced.

The birth of the church is absolutely miraculous and utterly inexplicable apart from the power of the Spirit. And the people he used were ordinary people like Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus. They just believed Jesus was real and then took him at his word.

I look around now at what we have, Summit. We've got our problems, but are we any less than they were? Can't we see this again in our generation? I read this recently: historians estimate the total number of Christians at the end of the 1st century at about 7500. That's it! 7500. We have way more than that in this one church this one weekend! And yet, by 300 A.D., that 7500 had multiplied so that nearly half of the population of the civilized world had confessed faith in Jesus. Don't we want to see that happen again? What is stopping us? If God used ordinary, messed up people in the first century, can't he use us, too?

Paul wrote 1 Corinthians to cut through the cultural and sinful noise--and to call this church back to the gospel. And it's what God is calling us to, too. To come back to the gospel. This letter is as relevant to us as it is to them. Amen?

Ready for the last 3 verses? **22 If anyone does not love the Lord, a curse be on him.** You say, "Well, Paul, that is not a very nice thing to say in conclusion." Yes, but Paul is not being mean. In Romans 9, he explained that if he could, he would go to hell himself if it meant others could be saved. So I have a hard time seeing Paul being hateful in saying this; it's just that--listen to this--Paul agrees with God's judgments that anyone who does not have love for Jesus is accursed. That applies to us, too. Either we have love for Jesus, or we are accursed. The gospel is a serious matter. The gospel is that God loves you so much that he came to earth to die for you. Bore your sin,

shame. Only one way to be saved--he alone can provide it. Who are you to say there are multiple ways to God as if you can improve on his way? And if you reject that, you are choosing condemnation. You have rejected his son. You've rejected him. You have chosen cursing on yourself.

But for those who love him, **22 Our Lord, come! 23 The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you. 24 My love be with all of you in Christ Jesus.**

And all God's people said...

Let's pray.

