*DAILY DEVOTIONS*

March 23 - 28

*First Corinthians Chapter Sixteen*

**Monday, March 23 1 Corinthians 16:1-4**

*“Now about the collection for God’s people”*

 The collection to which Paul refers formed a major enterprise of his third missionary journey. Significant numbers of Jewish Christians in Jerusalem were impoverished, and Paul spent substantial energy raising funds from various Gentile churches in Asia and Europe to help meet their needs. But in addition to alleviating physical suffering, Paul undoubtedly saw the collection as an opportunity to bring greater unity within the church across Jewish and Gentile boundaries, to pay off a spiritual debt of sorts that the Gentile congregations owed their “mother church” in Jerusalem, and to demonstrate the genuineness of Gentile Christianity to skeptical Jewish Christians.

 In addition, the offering would be a testimony to the unsaved world and to Christians everywhere of the faith and love of those who participated. More people might well be won to Christ, and others would grow in their faith and give an outpouring of thanks to God.

*We are called to be generous, Lord, as a witness to your generosity. Amen.*

**Tuesday, March 24 Romans 15:23-29**

*“Before I come, I must go to Jerusalem”*

 In this letter to the Christians in Rome, written while in Corinth, Paul mentions his next three intended destinations: first Jerusalem, then Rome to spend time with them, and then on to Spain to bring the gospel there. The purpose of Paul’s visit to Jerusalem is to bring to a successful climax his long-cherished project of collecting money from Gentile churches for the impoverished saints in the home city of the gospel, including Gentile churches in Macedonia (which include Philippi and Thessalonica) and Achaia (which includes Corinth).

 Paul has requested money from them, but he makes it clear that they gave of their own free will. For Paul, this is not just a charitable project; it is also designed to bring into closer fellowship Gentile and Jewish believers. Paul will only head for Rome and Spain when he has completed this task of bringing the collection to Jerusalem. Why must Paul himself accompany the collection? Paul, as the apostle to the Gentiles, must accompany the gift in order to authenticate its purpose as a material as well as a spiritual gift from Gentile to Jewish Christians.

*When we give, Lord, others are blessed in many ways. Amen.*

**Wednesday, March 25 1 Corinthians 16:5-9**

*“I am coming to visit you”*

 As Paul prepares to close his letter, he includes some personal remarks concerning his current ministry itinerary. His goal is to come to Corinth (modern southern Greece) to visit them after he has revisited Macedonia (modern northern Greece), and to spend a full winter with them. Paul’s motivation was at least twofold: (1) He wanted to have a significant period of time with the troubled Corinthians in hopes of substantially improving the situation in the church there; and (2) he hoped to avoid having to travel during that season of the year in which the high seas were generally impassable and travel overland was much more arduous.

 Paul informs us of his current location (Ephesus, in modern Turkey), which enables us to date the writing of this letter to the events of Acts 19. There we see ample illustrations of the two principles of verse 9 – “a great door for effective work” and “many who oppose me.” The former included remarkable conversions and turning away from idols, the latter, occult opposition and town riots.

*Bless the time, Lord, when we visit Sisters and Brothers in Christ. Amen.*

*DAILY DEVOTIONS*

March 23 - 28

*First Corinthians Chapter Sixteen*

**Thursday, March 26 1 Corinthians 16:10-12**

*“When Timothy comes”*

 Paul’s concern over how Timothy will be received is most likely related to their conflict with Paul himself, and it is probably heightened by Timothy’s youthfulness and possible even by his personality. (2 Timothy 1:7 seems to suggest that Timothy was a naturally timid person.) Paul wants the church to treat his representative and “son in the Lord” with respect and consideration.

 Verse 12 appears to respond to the final question the Corinthians had raised in their letter to Paul. Not only does Paul again say “now about,” but it is unlikely that he alone would have taken the initiative to urge Apollos to return to Corinth in light of the danger of inflaming the divisiveness that existed between the various factions within the church who each had their preferred leader (see chapter one). Did the Corinthians suspect that Paul was hindering Apollos from coming when they really wanted to see him? Apollos’ reluctance to go could reflect his concern to wait for a more opportune time when things had settled down in Corinth.

*Thank you, Lord, for those you call to lead in your church. Amen.*

**Friday, March 27 1 Corinthians 16:13-18**

*“The household of Stephanas”*

 Verse 13 contains four parallel commands employing military metaphors to encourage resoluteness in faith. Balancing these commands to be strong is the call to love in verse 14. As with Paul’s discussion of spiritual gifts in chapters 12-14, all Christian activity must take place within the sphere of putting others above self.

 In verses 15-18 Paul gives thanks for three Corinthian Christians who have come to him in Ephesus and encouraged him. In 1:16 we learned that Paul baptized the household of Stephanas. We know nothing else about Fortunatus or Achaicus, although the former was a Hellenistic name often adopted by a freed slave (meaning “fortunate”). It is possible that both of these men were part of Stephanas’ household, once slaves but now freedmen who had travelled with Stephanas to visit and support Paul. These men not only renewed Paul’s spirit but were also an encouragement to their fellow Corinthians. They should be recognized and honored for their ministry.

*We are grateful, Lord, for all who serve in your name. Amen.*

**Saturday, March 28 1 Corinthians 16:19-24**

*“Final greetings”*

 Verses 19-20 convey greetings to the Corinthian churches from four groups of fellow believers: (1) the various churches in Asia Minor; (2) Paul’s good friends Aquila and Priscilla, coworkers with him in Corinth and later partners with him in his ministry in Ephesus; (3) the specific house church that met in their home; and, (4) Paul’s other immediate companions in ministry. In verse 21 Paul himself, no longer dictating his letter to his secretary, picks up the pen and writes his closing greeting.

 Both parts of verse 22 follow abruptly. They may reflect conventional statements used by the early church. Paul’s “curse” utilizes the Greek expression *anathema* which he has used elsewhere to indicate a person who is excluded from the Christian community. “Come, O Lord” is the translation of the Aramaic *Marana tha.* Together the two expressions reflect the profound seriousness with which the early church viewed faithfulness to Christ. He ends his letter with one final reminder of his love for these often exasperating Christians in Corinth.

*May we, like Paul, Lord, love those who are difficult to love. Amen.*