



Lesson One - One Mission

1 Corinthians 16:1-4

Churches Working Together on One Mission

Brief Introduction and Review of the Opening Video:

Welcome to the "Give+Go" Bible study series. This four-session study series was crafted to answer the question Carlos asked in the Session One Video Introduction, "How does the Baptist system work?" It is not uncommon for life-long Baptists to struggle with understanding how Southern Baptist missionaries are trained, placed, and supported while on the mission field. The instruction and support available to those preparing for ministry is another area of Baptist work that may be unknown to faithful Baptist church members. Our hope is by the end of the series, your group will have a much better understanding of how your church plays an integral part in fulfilling the Great Commission, helping to take the Gospel to the "ends of the earth." (Acts 1:8). Just as important is the part your church plays in preparing the next generation of pastors and staff members.

This would be a good time to review the South Carolina stories introduced in the video and the questions that closed the video introduction. How would your group answer the questions Carlos asked? How does one prepare to be a pastor or missionary? What is the local church's responsibility in the process? How is all this funded?

The People, the Places, and Problems They Faced:

From the outset it is important to understand these four studies are a Bible study series. Scripture is central to all we do as South Carolina Baptists. This means Scripture will both structure and guide the four lessons. From this series comes a clear understanding of how South Carolina Baptist churches fulfill the challenges and instruction of God's Word.

The focal passages for the Give+Go Bible Study Series are found in 1 and 2 Corinthians. A bit of background information is necessary to help put these passages in the proper context. While on his second missionary journey, the Apostle Paul travels through the region of Macedonia, establishing churches in Phillippi, Thessalonica, and Berea. In Paul's day, this region would have been part of the Roman Empire. Today, this region is still known as Macedonia and can be found in northern Greece. We are told in 2 Corinthians 8:1-5 these churches experienced "severe trials" and poverty. Despite these significant challenges, the churches are remembered for being extremely generous, "begging" for the opportunity to minister. (More on this in lessons 2-4.)

The same cannot be said for the next church on Paul's journey. Following his time in Macedonia, Paul moves south, establishing a church in the city of Corinth. This church is very different from the churches in Macedonia. Corinth is a wealthy port city that also served as a center for finance and commerce. Those in the Corinthian church had a very different set of challenges from those to their north. Poverty and persecution were not experienced to the same degree. The young church was challenged with moving from the human standards of wealth and prosperity to a

value system founded in the sufficiency of Christ. The church at Corinth may have been a wealthy church, but it was also an immature church.

What connects these four churches is the challenge Paul issues to take up an offering for the “saints” in Jerusalem. Like the churches in Macedonia, those in the church in Jerusalem were being persecuted for their faith. Additionally, Jerusalem and the surrounding area struggled under the prolonged effects of a famine. Today’s study examines Paul’s initial challenge to the church in Corinth. Lessons 2-4 finds Paul having to encourage those in Corinth to complete their commitment.

What Seems Simple May Not Be So Simple: 1 Corinthians 16:1-4:

As we begin to look at 1 Corinthians 16:1-4, it is important to remember that Paul has a strong relationship with the Corinthian church. He founded the church, disciplined the leadership, built strong relationship with the congregation, and for a time lived in the community. He cares about these people both spiritually and personally. What we see as a book of the New Testament began as a letter to people Paul very much cared for. A quick review of the first 15 chapters of 1 Corinthians tells us that Paul also recognizes he was writing to what was still a young (immature) church, made up of young leaders and young believers. His concern for their spiritual maturity can be found throughout the letter.

After much instruction in the first 15 chapters, we come to the closing chapter of 1 Corinthians. Paul offers the personal remarks found in chapter 16 for two important reasons. The first is the practical matter of authenticity. Paul wants to make sure there is no confusion as to who is writing the letter. Personal comments would not likely come from a forger claiming to be the Apostle.

The second reason is personal connection. As mentioned above, Paul has a great deal of affection for those receiving this letter. Think about how much effort is required to arrange correspondence between distant cities in the first century. Ephesus, the place of Paul’s writing 1 Corinthians, and the city of Corinth, are approximately 347 miles apart. (An eight-day trip by sea in the 1st century.) What we can do instantly through email or text message required many days of travel in the first century. For Paul, those in Corinth were worth the effort.

The opening sentence in chapter 16 identifies the transition from spiritual instruction to personal training. Paul is making a powerful connection between the churches when he uses the word “saints.” The Jerusalem church was a congregation of Jewish believers. Persecution for the Jerusalem church came primarily from other Jews that did not believe Christ to be the promised Savior. The churches in Macedonia and Corinth were made up of both Jewish and Gentile believers; Backgrounds that were very different from those in the Jerusalem church. Paul connects these churches, referring to the Corinthian believers as “Saints” in chapter 1:2, and the Jerusalem believers in 16:1. In one sentence Paul is able to bridge ethnic and economic barriers through faith in Christ. To ensure the Corinthians understanding of ALL churches being included, he also lists the Galatian church as receiving these same instructions.

Why is it important for Paul to connect ALL churches to this offering? An essential lesson is being taught. The Corinthian church is linked to something much larger than themselves. The spiritual challenge facing those in Corinth is no different from the challenge churches face today. Every fellowship can struggle with efforts being turned inward. Local needs take priority, leaving

regional, national, and global needs to be cared for by others. An unexpected expense or financial setback causes the church to reduce Cooperative Program Giving. (More on Cooperative Program giving, also known as “CP,” is included in the next Give+Go lesson.) Budgets are changed to address the current need but never realigned to former levels once the challenge passes. The result is a fellowship that loses the vision for ministry beyond its own walls. The unintentional lesson being taught to the congregation is one of selfishness rather than selflessness. In a short amount of time, individual attitudes match those of the fellowship. When was the last time your church sacrificed financially to serve the needs of others regionally, nationally, or internationally?

For Paul, the process of gathering the funds needed for the struggling church in Jerusalem was simple enough to be covered in just one verse. (16:2) Sunday was to be the day when each member would set aside and save an amount reflecting how they were blessed financially. Paul is offering a practical illustration of compounded faithfulness. The amount collected using this process would be far greater than what would be collected in a one-time appeal. His instructions were clear, concise, and effective. No last-minute appeal when he arrived should be necessary.

An additional question worth considering is why would Paul want the funds to be collected in his absence? Verses 3 and 4 help to answer this question. It is clear Paul wants to protect both the motives for the offering and his reputation, while also using the effort as a teaching opportunity. Let's not forget to whom Paul is writing. As mentioned in the written introduction, Corinth was a financial center. Many in the Corinthian church would be accustomed to handling large sums of money. They would value these funds being collected with great care and integrity. The affluence of the congregation means the total collected could be substantial. Nowhere in this passage or in the passages referenced in the rest of this series will you find Paul taking responsibility for the collected funds. He wants those recommended by the church to bear this responsibility. This approach prevents any accusations of Paul using the funds for his own purposes. Paul cannot spend or misuse funds that were never in his possession. This process ensures the protection of Paul's reputation.

Just as important to Paul is the blessing the messengers will receive when they present the gift to Jerusalem church leaders. The journey from Corinth to Jerusalem was over 700 miles by boat and more than 1,800 miles by land. Scripture does not tell us how the offering was transported. In either case, the investment of time and travel was significant. One can only imagine the joy and stories told by the group that traveled to Jerusalem. Paul knew the stories of blessings and gratitude would live on in both fellowships long past the money given. Two thousand years later we benefit from Paul's wisdom.

There is one final question worth asking as we conclude the first Give+Go lesson. Why is it important for one church to offer support for another? Think about it...a very different group of people, geographically, ethnically, and financially, is being asked to support a group of fellow believers they have never met. Without the influence of Paul, the church in Corinth would have no knowledge of the struggles in Jerusalem. Paul is making an unusual request. The Jerusalem church should take responsibility for not being prepared, right? Unfortunately, if this question is asked seriously, it reveals a misunderstanding of what a church centered in Christ must represent. The character of a Christ-centered church is one of sacrifice. Just as Christ sacrificed that we may be forgiven of our sins, the church—a body of born-again believers—must model this sacrifice. Scripture is clear; all churches have the same mission, One Mission. *“Go, therefore, make disciples of*

all nations, baptizing them in the name of the father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:19-20)