

# FIRST CORINTHIANS

## Chapter Sixteen

### Introduction

Christians often think in terms of **limits**. Take the subject of giving to the Lord's work as an example. Ask most believers how much they ought to give to the Lord's work and they will tell you 10%. We refer to the collection as the "receiving of tithes" – *tithe* meaning 10%. Some of us may not actually reach 10% in our giving; some of us may exceed 10% in our giving. But whether we each actually give 10% or not, that amount sticks in our minds.

If 10% sticks in your mind, it is a limit, and you therefore think in terms of limits as far as your giving is concerned.

*That is not the way you ought to think!* The apostle Paul discusses giving in the opening verses of chapter sixteen and never once mentions 10%, the tithe, or any other such limit. Rather than think in terms of limits, he says in verse fourteen,

1 Corinthians 16:14 Let all *that* you *do* be done with love.

**Love** should set your limits. When love sets your limits, you're set free from them to follow the leading of the Lord.

As he closes his letter to the Corinthians, Paul wants them to change the way they think. He wants them to be set free from their limits to follow the leading of the Lord. He mentions three important areas of the Christian life: *giving*, *going*, and *greeting* one another. He starts with giving, and we'll see that you should,

#1 Let Your Love For The Lord  
Set The Limits For Your Giving  
(v1-4)

The "collection for the saints" is the subject of these first four verses.

1 Corinthians 16:1 Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given orders to the churches of Galatia, so you must do also:

Paul was soliciting the Gentile churches for a special collection to help the Jewish believers in Jerusalem. The saints in Jerusalem had suffered intense persecution for many years; they had been stripped of their possessions, prevented from getting all but the most menial of jobs, and even imprisoned. An offering from the Gentile churches would be of great practical help, and it would express the spiritual oneness of the church as the Gentile believers sacrificed for their Jewish brothers and sisters.

Paul is talking about a specific collection for specific saints; but what he says is applicable beyond that to the regular collection taken by the church.

1 Corinthians 16:2 On the first *day* of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come.

In the New Testament church the regular, weekly meeting of believers was on the “first day of the week,” which is Sunday. The last day of the week, Saturday, was the Jewish Sabbath. The Church – including saved Jews and Gentiles – worshipped on the first day of the week, Sunday. It was the day Jesus rose from the dead; the day Jesus first appeared to His gathered disciples; the day upon which the Church was born in the book of Acts. Sunday worship is *not* a new, Christian “sabbath.” It is *not* a day to be filled with rules and regulations and restrictions. It is a day of worship and celebration and for doing the work of the Lord. And it includes taking an offering for doing the work of the Lord.

The collection should be taken weekly at the Sunday worship service. It involves “each one of you.” Giving to the Lord’s work on earth is a fundamental discipline in the Christian life. Though you may “give” of your time and talent, those activities comes under the category of serving. Giving is about your money.

You are to “lay something aside, storing up as [you] may prosper.” Your giving of money to the work of the Lord is strictly up to you! There is no set percentage or amount; there is no limit to reach or exceed.

What about the tithe? Let’s look at tithing in the Old Testament. Both Abraham and Jacob gave a tithe; but in neither case did God specify

a percentage, or any amount at all. There is no indication in Scripture that God's people regularly gave a tithe before the time of Moses. The tithe is first prescribed by God during the time of Moses. It was to be paid to the priests as their support. They, in turn, were to give a tithe of their tithe. A second tithe was required to be paid to support the national feasts and holidays. Each third year another, third, tithe was required in order to fund benevolence for the foreigners, widows, and orphans among the Israelites. As you study the relevant passages you find that the Israelite, under the Mosaic Law, was required to pay about 23% and the various tithes were essentially a **tax** to support the functioning of the nation. The required tithes of the Old Testament are not your model for giving to the Lord's work.

The basic principle for giving to the Lord's work in the Old Testament is reflected in Proverbs three where you read, "Honor the Lord from your wealth, and from the first of all your produce; so your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will overflow with new wine." The principle was *heart-directed generosity*, based on thankfulness to the Lord. Required giving was taxation; freewill giving was from the heart – left up to each individual.

Like the Israelites, we are required to pay taxes in support of the functioning of our nation. As for supporting the work of the Lord: Freewill giving is to be from the heart – left up to each of you. **No** amount or percentage is ever specified or required in the New Testament. In other portions of Scripture you learn that your giving should be regular, cheerful, thankful, and generous; it is to be a portion you set aside from what God has blessed you with – whether He has blessed you with much or with little.

1 Corinthians 16:3 And when I come, whomever you approve by *your* letters I will send to bear your gift to Jerusalem.

1 Corinthians 16:4 But if it is fitting that I go also, they will go with me.

Paul's plan was to have the Corinthians choose certain men to carry the offering to Jerusalem. They would carry "letters" of introduction to the saints at Jerusalem. If his plans called for him to return to Jerusalem, he would accompany them. With or without him, they were to arrange to get the special collection to its destination.

We gather as a church on the first day of the week, Sunday, as was the pattern of the New Testament church. We take a regular collection to support and further the work of the Lord on earth. We also have certain “special” collections:

1. We have a Deacons Fund which exists to meet the temporary needs of individuals and families in times of crisis.
2. We have a Calvary Care Centers account which supports local, national, and international ministries and missionaries.
3. We have a Building Fund to help with the purchase of our land and the construction of a future home for our congregation.

Giving is a touchy subject in the church, primarily because it has been abused by church leaders. Often you are solicited for money; manipulated into giving. Instead of being an opportunity, your giving becomes an obligation. Our policy is to provide information without solicitation. What you give is between you and the Lord.

**Your love for the Lord should set the limits of your giving!** Love always goes beyond the limits you set. Love sets you free from limits to simply follow the leading of the Lord.

The next few verses deal with Paul’s ministry plans. You learn to,

#2 Let Your Love For The Lord  
Set The Limits For Your Going  
(v5-12)

In verse five Paul uses the words, “wherever I go.” Jesus told us to “Go... and make disciples of all nations.” “Going” may involve missionary work, but that is *not* the primary meaning. The verb tense of the word “go” is *as you are going*. You are to see your life as an opportunity to minister for the Lord *as you are going* about your daily business.

Paul was a missionary in the classic sense; he discusses his “going.”

1 Corinthians 16:5 Now I will come to you when I pass through Macedonia (for I am passing through Macedonia).

1 Corinthians 16:6 And it may be that I will remain, or even spend the winter with you, that you may send me on my journey, wherever I go.

1 Corinthians 16:7 For I do not wish to see you now on the way; but I hope to stay a while with you, if the Lord permits.

Paul planned to pass through these regions, then arrive in Corinth to receive the collection. It was his desire to spend the winter months with them in Corinth, then be sent on his way.

You are not a missionary in the classic sense, but you can learn some things about serving the Lord while “going” about your daily business.

Paul had a plan; **you** should have a plan. As you go about your daily business, you should be plan how you can best minister to those whom God has set around you.

Paul was flexible; **you** should be flexible. Having plans doesn't eliminate the need to sense and follow the Lord's leading.

Paul wanted to be thorough; **you** should want to be thorough. He wanted to spend quality time ministering to them. Whatever ministry you do, it ought to be the very best you are able to perform.

You learn something more in verses eight and nine:

1 Corinthians 16:8 But I will tarry in Ephesus until Pentecost.

1 Corinthians 16:9 For a great and effective door has opened to me, and *there are* many adversaries.

Paul expected and experienced opposition; **you** should expect and will experience opposition. Opposition is an opportunity to stand in God's grace and share His mercy.

You learn something more in verses ten and eleven:

1 Corinthians 16:10 And if Timothy comes, see that he may be with you without fear; for he does the work of the Lord, as I also *do*.

1 Corinthians 16:11 Therefore let no one despise him. But send him on his journey in peace, that he may come to me; for I am waiting for him with the brethren.

It is terrible that Paul has to warn the Corinthians how to treat Timothy. Here you learn that some of your greatest difficulties will not come from your adversaries in the world, but from your acquaintances in the church!

One final lesson about “going” about in your daily life, serving the Lord, in verse twelve.

1 Corinthians 16:12 Now concerning *our* brother Apollos, I strongly urged him to come to you with the brethren, but he was quite unwilling to come at this time; however, he will come when he has a convenient time.

The Corinthians apparently had asked Paul to send Apollos to them; but Apollos said “No.” From this you learn that you must respect the leading of God’s Spirit in someone else’s life. You should not try to manipulate others, even for their own good.

You are “going” through the world on a daily basis. You may not feel like a missionary, since so much of your life is local; but you are still under the Great Commission to “Go... and make disciples.”

As with giving, you can think in terms of limits in your serving the Lord. For example: You don’t see how you have the time to be involved in certain ministries. I have found that if you will ignore such limits and let love guide you that you will have all the time you need!

Let love set the limits as you are going through the world and you will be set free to simply follow the leading of the Lord.

One more topic is on Paul’s heart as he closes the letter:

#3 Let Your Love For The Lord  
Set The Limits For Your Greetings  
(v13-24)

In verses fifteen through twenty Paul mentions a host of other believers: “the household of Stephanas,” “Fortunatus,” “Achaicus,” “the churches of Asia,” “Aquila and Priscilla... with the church that is in their house.” Then he says this in verse twenty:

1 Corinthians 16:20 All the brethren greet you. Greet one another with a holy kiss.

“Greet one another” carries a deeper meaning. It means that you should be able and ready to sincerely greet your brothers and sisters in the Lord. It means that,

Matthew 5:23 ...if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you,  
Matthew 5:24 leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.

This is an area where you can definitely set limits! Instead, let love set your limits – which sets you free from them to sincerely greet one another.

Paul says to greet one another with a “holy kiss.” Let me give you the history of the holy kiss. In the New Testament church, it was a symbolic expression of the love, forgiveness, and unity that existed among believers. It became associated with the celebration of Communion, as a prelude to partaking the elements, to show that you had no problems with other believers that needed to be resolved. It was not restricted to your own gender: men did kiss men, and women kissed women, but men and women also kissed each other.

Now that got out of hand! Or at least it gave unbelievers the wrong impression late in the second century. By the third century the holy kiss was restricted to kissing those of your own gender only – men kissing men, women kissing women. By the fourth century, the clergy and the common people were restricted from kissing one another.

We could reintroduce the holy kiss; but we’d probably go through this same pattern and, in the end, men would kiss men, women would kiss women, and I would kiss other pastors...

**Or** we could follow the traditions of our own culture and give handshakes and hugs. People tend to abuse these as well...

**Or** we could simply be certain in our hearts that our greeting are sincere – regardless the preferred physical means of communication!

Look back at verses thirteen and fourteen:

1 Corinthians 16:13 Watch, stand fast in the faith, be brave, be strong.  
1 Corinthians 16:14 Let all *that* you *do* be done with love.

The exhortations in verse thirteen are all military terms. Like good soldiers, you must:

1. “Watch” – which means be alert.
2. “Stand fast” – which means to stand your ground “in the faith,” in the truth of God’s Word.
3. “Be brave” – which means to act like mature men and women.
4. “Be strong” – literally, let God strengthen you.

All these things are yours when all that you do is motivated by love rather than any limits you might set.

## Conclusion

Paul concludes, saying,

- 1 Corinthians 16:21 The salutation with my own hand—Paul’s.  
1 Corinthians 16:22 If anyone does not love the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be accursed. O Lord, come!  
1 Corinthians 16:23 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ *be* with you.  
1 Corinthians 16:24 My love *be* with you all in Christ Jesus. Amen.

The letter was dictated by Paul to a male secretary; but he signed it himself. I like the King James Version of verse twenty-two: “Anathema Maranatha.” In the original language it reads something like this: “Our Lord come! And take away the accursed.” “Our Lord come” is a translation of the word *Maranatha!* Maranatha is formed by the three parts:

1. *Mar* – Lord
2. *An* – our
3. *Atha* – to come

It can mean “our Lord has come,” our Lord is coming,” our simply “our Lord, come.” It is a great greeting or salutation for believers to adopt. We should all be set free from our self-imposed limits and say to each other and to everyone,

*“Maranatha! The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. My love be with you all in Christ Jesus.”*