

Iglesia de Carne

Studies in First Corinthians

Text

First Corinthians 16:1-24

Topic

Paul describes the household of Stephanas as having “addicted themselves” to serving the saints

Title

“Serve-aholics Theonomous”

While preparing to go undercover, Jack Bauer started shooting-up heroin in order to convincingly pass himself off as a drug user. He kept using heroin during the operation, and afterward. As Day 3 of the series 24 began, he was still addicted.

Jack **addicted himself** for the success of his mission.

The household of Stephanas did something similar. If you’re reading in the KJV, verse fifteen is translated, “they have **addicted themselves** to the ministry of the saints.” They **addicted themselves** to their mission of serving God’s saints.

Most undercover agents employ evasive tactics rather than participate in drug use, or other illegal activities.

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First Corinthians 16:1-24

“Serve-aholics Theonomous”



If a believer can addict himself or herself to serving, it must follow that we can avoid serving by employing evasive tactics.

We will concentrate on addicting ourselves to serving, keeping an eye out for any mental reservation, or purpose of evasion.

I'll organize my comments around two points: **#1 Celebrate The Example Of Believers Who Have Addicted Themselves To Serve** and **#2 Catch The Earnestness Of Believers Who Have Addicted Themselves To Serve.**

#1 - Celebrate The Example Of Believers Who Have Addicted Themselves To Serve (v1-21)

As the apostle Paul closed-out this letter, he named seven specific servants... and one entire household of servants... and a house church of servants... and a church of servants... and a group of churches who served. He only described one person and household as addicting themselves, but I think it would be alright to see the others as addicted, too.

BTW - In case you haven't Googled it yet, "Theonomous" is a real word. It means, *governed by God; subject to God's authority*. It perfectly describes a self-addicted servant of the Lord.

I want to start with verses thirteen and fourteen. They summarize a self-addicted, serve-aholic. It is what you could see in those Paul listed, and what he wanted for the beloved in Corinth. It is what we want for ourselves.

1Co 16:13 Watch, stand fast in the faith, be brave, be strong.

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



At least once most days I hear someone thank a stranger for their military service. I'll do it now: If you are active duty or retired, "Thank you for your service."

I thought of that because the words Paul used in verses thirteen and fourteen are military vocabulary applied to believers. That alone tells us that serving God's saints is more like being in the military than it is working for an employer.

For example: In the military, they tell you where to go. I realize there is some latitude in terms of choosing your posting. But, generally speaking, they post you as needed. After all, someone had to go to Adak.

It's easy for a believer to bring an employment attitude to bear on their walk with the Lord. As if they decide where to go, not the Lord.

I'll tell you: Knowing you are where the Lord led you, and wants you, is better than being in some seeming paradise on earth of your own choosing, floundering spiritually.

You are on "watch." There are at least three things being on watch suggests:

1. First, we are to understand that we are constantly on watch. We're not just watching when we serve in the church or are involved in official activities. It's a 24/7 position.
2. Second, we are to adopt an attitude of *"Not on my watch!"* with regard to any advancement by our enemies. We can't give ground to the devil nor yield to the flesh - even for a moment.
3. Third, we are also watching for the imminent return of the Lord.

Next you read that you are to "stand fast in the faith." This isn't telling you to have more faith. "The faith" is a term that describes the nonnegotiable truths of the Bible. You are to believe you have every resource for godly living.



"Be brave." The KJV reads, "quit you like men," meaning act like a man, grow up, be mature. Coming on the heels of standing fast, it reminds me of those scenes in movies when the enemy is fast approaching, but the heroes hold their ground... And hold it... And hold it, right up until the last second.

"Be strong." Literally it is "be strengthened." It is something done to you not by you. It is a reminder that the Lord indwells us by His Holy Spirit to empower us.

Something to meditate upon. We sometimes think of the Holy Spirit as being depleted over time - like a battery going dead. The Holy Spirit is a Person. We either yield to Him, or we don't. He's at full-power all the time.

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

All this soldier-talk is now qualified by the word "love."

I'm to have the submission and discipline of a special forces soldier - Servant Team 6 - and then act with the humility, the mercy, the gentleness, and the compassion of the Lord's love.

Now we can celebrate the saints who example this to us.

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

Around the time of Paul's writing the mostly Jewish church in Jerusalem was suffering terribly:

👤 Church history records that there was a severe famine.

👤 Adding to the difficulties of the famine, the Christians were being systematically persecuted.



Paul had instructed the churches in the regions of Galatia to collect financial aid for the Jerusalem Christians. He said to the believers in Corinth, "so you must do also."

He didn't *suggest* they give... Or that they *pray* about giving... He told them to give. You even read the word "orders."

We don't order you to give. Even Paul's orders are going to be qualified by what he said in verse two. This was a special, one-time gift. We need to be careful using it to teach about giving to God's work in general. Nevertheless, giving characterizes serving.

1Co 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.

The believers met when? On Sunday. They didn't meet on the Sabbath, on Saturday. And neither has Sunday somehow become the Sabbath Day.

"As he may prosper" indicates it was up to each believer to determine his or her giving.

Paul wanted them done before he arrived. It wasn't that he had some aversion to passing the plate.

He wanted them to be efficient servants - not waiting till the last moment.

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

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

There was no PayPal in those days; no wire transfers between banks. The monies collected had to be hand-carried. The fact they would carry "letters" of approval meant these were men of solid character and integrity.



It was best to send several men to insure the safe delivery of the money. Travel was a hazard.

They were willing to serve the body in Jerusalem risking their very lives. Serving always involves risk, if not danger.

Paul was ready to go with them... Or not. The Lord was his travel agent.

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

1Co 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.

1Co 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.

As a full-time itinerant minister, Paul had some idea of where he'd be tomorrow, but that's about it. He might hang with the Corinthians a few days, or for a season. All he could hope for was to be there "a while." After that, it was "wherever."

Do you have your whole life planned out? Are you certain it is God's plan, too? Here is a question that might help you decide - Does the plan involve serving the Lord *more*... Or *less*?

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

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

Paul had wanted to go to Ephesus once before. God closed the door; He wouldn't let Paul go there. Instead, that first time, God sent Paul to Macedonia.

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First Corinthians 16:1-24

"Serve-aholics Theonomus"



Immediately he was put in prison overnight at Philippi. Then he was run out of town from Thessalonica. He might have thought he'd chosen the wrong door - but we see in hindsight that God was in charge.

When Paul finally got the green light to go to Ephesus, when the "great and effective door... opened" to him, he was met by "many adversaries." One sense of what he was saying is that he couldn't leave Ephesus yet because there were still adversaries to overcome. Like Joshua in the Promised Land.

Paul expected and experienced opposition. He didn't assume that opposition meant God had closed a door of serving; could be just the opposite.

Don't immediately withdraw or quit in the face of opposition. Value the opportunity to serve opposed.

1Co 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*.

1Co 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.

Timothy was a young disciple who was Paul's companion on many of his journeys. His mother, Eunice, and his grandmother, Lois, are commended for their raising him in the things of the Lord.

We know nothing of his father except that he was a Greek. He is first brought into notice at the time of Paul's second visit to Lystra where he probably resided and where it seems he was converted during Paul's first visit to that city. The apostle called him his "own son in the faith" and arranged that he should become his traveling companion.

Paul urged the believers to not "despise" Timothy. In his first letter to Timothy, Paul wrote, "Let no one despise your youth" (4:12).



Imagine being Timothy. I'm exaggerating, but it seems everywhere he went, Christians despised him for his youth.

- 👤 His despisers: Had they undergone a painful adult circumcision in order to attend synagogue with Paul?
- 👤 His despisers: Had they experienced the daily dangers to life and limb merely by accompanying Paul?

Timothy was one of Paul's closest co-workers, yet he was despised. Still, he served - even saints who despised him.

There's a scene in the Val Kilmer film, *The Saint*, where Elizabeth Shue's character makes a run for the gate of the US Embassy in Moscow. She makes it, and as the gate shuts, the Marine guard orders the Russian mobster, "Back away from the gate." The mobster spits on the Marine - in his face. He has no reaction. It's as if he is saying, "Is that all you got?" Any retaliation would make him look weaker, not stronger.

1Co 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.

Apollos was a Jew from Alexandria, described as eloquent and mighty in the Scriptures. He had been instructed in the way of the Lord according to the imperfect understanding of the disciples of John the Baptist; but on his coming to Ephesus he had been more perfectly taught by Aquila and Priscilla. He became a preacher of the Gospel first in Achaia and then in Corinth.

Paul "strongly urged" Apollos to go to Corinth. I don't think I could refuse Paul. Apollos did, and one thing we can glean from his refusal is that, like the RCA terrier, Nipper, a servant listens for his Masters voice.



God may speak through others, of course. But it must resonate with what He tells you.

1Co 16:15 I urge you, brethren - you know the household of Stephanas, that it is the firstfruits of Achaia, and *that* they have devoted themselves to the ministry of the saints -

1Co 16:16 that you also submit to such, and to everyone who works and labors with *us*.

The “household of Stephanas” were the first of Paul’s converts in Corinth. They got saved and immediately got to serving. Looking at them you came to the conclusion that they were addicted to serving. They had all the tell-tale signs.

1Co 16:17 I am glad about the coming of Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus, for what was lacking on your part they supplied.

1Co 16:18 For they refreshed my spirit and yours. Therefore acknowledge such men.

These three men were probably the ones who brought to Paul the letter from the Corinthians asking him to clarify the issues he covered in this letter.

Their faith and faithfulness, which was “lacking” in most of the Corinthians, was “supplied” to Paul as an encouragement.

I can see how these guys “refreshed [Paul’s] spirit,” but how did they refresh the spirit of the Corinthians? It seems to mean that their visit gave Paul the opportunity to respond personally to the church and therefore “refresh” any who would receive his letter as the Word of God.

1Co 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.



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

The “churches of Asia” would include those in Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, Laodicea, Colosse, and Hieropolis. They were all founded thanks to the efforts of Paul as he responded to the open door of ministry to go to Ephesus.

“Aquila and Priscilla” owned the tent-making business that Paul worked for in Ephesus. They, too, were addicted to serving God’s saints.

“All the brethren” still greeted them - *even though the believers in Corinth were badly blowing it.*

In the New Testament church, a “holy kiss” was a symbolic expression of the love, forgiveness, and unity that existed among believers.

1Co 16:21 The salutation with my own hand - Paul's.

Paul dictated this letter to a copyist but at this point he took the pen and wrote the final words himself. It was a simple gesture but one that communicated his love and personal concern.

We titled this series, *Get Back to Where You Once Belonged*. That is certainly the spirit in which Paul paraded these examples to the saints in Corinth.

Let’s celebrate their example of addicting themselves to serve not as a duty, but as our delight.

#2 - Catch The Earnestness Of Believers Who Have Addicted Themselves To Serve (v22-24)



We caught a few scenes from a Disney film, *Togo*, that features sled dogs in Alaska. Those dogs love to run. They were born to it.

You - *you've been born-again to serve the saints.*

1Co 16:22 If anyone does not love the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be accursed.
O Lord, come!

"Love the Lord" is shorthand for those who are saved. It doesn't describe a super-saint, but every saint.

"Accursed" is the word *anathema*, and refers to the lost and who will perish if they do not receive the salvation offered to them.

They are **already** *anathema*. It is their position before God, as sinners.

"O Lord, come!" is a translation of the compound word *Maranatha!* Maranatha is formed by the three parts:

- ☪ "Mar" - Lord
- ☪ "An" - our
- ☪ "Atha" - to come

It can mean "our Lord has come," or "our Lord is coming." It can also be the expression of your constant desire as you say to the Lord, "Come!"

It's the kind of thing you say to be reminded, and remind others, that this life will soon be passed. Eternity awaits, and we will awaken to it in the likeness of Jesus.

1Co 16:23 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ *be* with you.



We too often prefer works to grace; programs to the Person of Jesus. We begin the Christian life spiritual. Let's not pursue it in our flesh.

1Co 16:24 My love be with you all in Christ Jesus. Amen.

Even the most straightforward reproof Paul delivered to them in this letter was motivated by "love" for them. He was in earnest trying to get them out of the proverbial pit and back on the pilgrim path.

Addiction is defined by medical professionals as a malady; something to be avoided, or cured. *Not in the case of serving the Lord.*

The application to our lives is easy: I am either addicting myself to serve; or I am evading it.

Did Jesus come to serve? Or to be served? What is true of him, ought to be true of us.

