

ARPC 1st Corinthians Ch 16 “An insight into the Churches ministry” 21st November 2021

We can tell a lot about a person and situation from the letters they write. As we conclude the first letter the Apostle Paul wrote to the Church in Corinth, we will learn much about him and his ministry to the churches. Those lessons should encourage us and challenge us to pursue the avenues of ministry he advocated and endorsed.

An international ministry (v1-4)

David Prior in his commentary points out the large number of areas mentioned in this concluding chapter. Galatia (v1) (Eastern Turkey, Asia) Jerusalem (v3) (Israel, Europe); Macedonia (v5) (N Greece Europe) Ephesus (v8) (West Turkey / Europe) Achaia (v15) (Greece Europe) The province of Asia (Turkey / East Asia) This wide range of large cities and countries includes, European and Asian; Jew and Arab; Greek and Roman; urban and rural. Paul was dealing with a mix of cultures, peoples and countries in his ministry, his world was international and well connected. The transport infrastructure was good, the Roman roads were wide and straight. Those in leadership were able to speak Greek, the lingua franca of the Roman world and peace and security abounded in the Pax Romana. This was an international church and ministry made possible by the circumstances of the day and primarily of course because of the truth and power of the gospel, to speak into every area of life and culture. Today in the 21st Century, we see this reality here in ARPC and with greater opportunity the church is global, our infrastructure is enhanced, our language is English, and we see that the gospel crosses into all cultures. The message of the cross is the power of God to those who are being saved. Is it not encouraging to bear witness to the power and universality of the good news of Jesus to every nation, tribe and language?

An interdependent ministry

Paul’s vision is not of independent churches but of connected and interdependent churches and one of the main ways he urges this interdependence is the support of other churches. The strong helping the weak. Paul throughout his letters often mentions his project of raising money for the church in Jerusalem. It was a big project that he saw as an opportunity for the churches to recognise their interdependence.

Shared finances (v1-4)

The church in Jerusalem was poor and its people struggled. The reasons for this are not entirely clear but three possibilities are mentioned,

1. They gave all their possessions away (Acts 2:45)
2. They were being severely persecuted and scattered (Acts 8:1)
3. They were facing a severe famine (Acts 11:28-29)

Paul sees an opportunity to show the love and unity of the gospel of Jesus Christ by organising a collection of money for their relief. He speaks of this more comprehensively in his second letter to the Corinthians in Ch’s 8-9. However here he succinctly outlines the way Christians should give money to their church and special causes.

Firstly, determine each week (Sunday first day) how much you have free to give in keeping with your income. It is not about the amount; it is about what you have. This will vary for different people and each week according to circumstances of that time. Set that amount aside so that it can be given to the church, etc. He is keen not to have this done in a guilty whip round when he arrives but to be the product of planned giving. Note he doesn't specify a tithe (a tenth) but a proportion depending on what you have and can afford.

Secondly, he reassures them that it will be handled appropriately by responsible and trustworthy people within the church. The finances of a church are an important and significant responsibility.

I commend this to you afresh, how has God blessed you, how much can you give. Plan to set that aside regularly (Weekly, monthly or quarterly, physically or electronically) and then bring it to church as an offering for the Lord's work in this church and further afield.

In ARPC we entrust this work to our committee and presently to Ray Speer in particular. We support different organisations, and our accounts are verified and presented at meetings of the committee and the AGM to the members. The more that is given the more we have to support ministry. My salary is set and does not rise the more you give. We recognise that God has blessed us, and we have responsibility to the work of this church but also other churches in Ireland and globally, in this way we reflect the international interdependence of the gospel as outlined by the Apostle.

Shared Personnel (v10-14)

The second way Paul encourages interdependence is in sharing personnel. ARPC has benefited enormously from the service and ministry of many people who have come to us from other churches. Without mentioning names, a moment's reflection allows us to recall their service. The benefit to us was and is great, and similarly we are a sending church and the benefit to other churches and organisations is also great. People are the best resource of the church. Paul mentions two people in particular, Timothy and Apollos.

Timothy was known to be a timid, shy but effective minister who came to faith through Paul's ministry. He is fearful of coming into a church that is divided and contains many who are "superior" types. Paul encourages the church to receive him, look after him and send him back to Paul. Paul is not coming personally but he is sending Timothy to minister and then to report back.

Apollos is portrayed here as his own man; he didn't do as Paul desired and it highlights Paul is not responsible for Apollos' nonappearance in Corinth. Many in the church liked Apollos, he was helpful to the church, an excellent apologist who ably defended the gospel against Jewish opposition. (Acts 18:24-28) Some wished to divide the church over these loyalties. Paul is keen to stress he has nothing against Apollos, he is not jealous of, nor against the ministry of Apollos and is defensive of him and his ministry.

We thank God for the many people who have come to us. You are our greatest resource, and we seek to welcome you, build you up, encourage you and give you opportunity to use your gifts in ministry among us and someday we may have to send you on to other places in the

Lord's providence and goodness. Paul urges acceptance and integration of all whom the Lord sends to us. "*No-one then should refuse to accept all those the Lord has brought*". Paul sees this as the essence of the gospel and the summary of the letter he has written for them to love and accept each other as they stand firm in the gospel and proclaim it courageously. (v13-14)

A flexible ministry (v5-9)

Paul's Travel plans

As I was writing this a question was asked of a committee I serve on if our conference planned for January should go ahead or be postponed considering Covid. We have become used to forward planning and certainty with little disruption. Covid has scuppered this certainty and we either just don't plan or we plan and adapt with flexibility. It appears Paul works in the latter category as we observe as he discusses his travel plans with the church.

He plans to travel to Macedonia and visit the churches in Philippi, Thessalonica and Berea, it is his intention to travel further South to Corinth (v5) He wants to stay with them, but not only for a short while if the Lord permits. (v7) He is conscious of the sovereignty of God, DV, Deo Volente, God willing! However, his plans are also practical, travel in winter is more difficult he will delay until after Pentecost a springtime event, and the work in Ephesus is going well with opposition (v9) After Corinth he is already thinking ahead, he knows he will travel on but doesn't know where and he will need the church in Corinth to help him (v6) with the decision and perhaps the means.

Paul is conscious that he makes plans, but the Lord is sovereign and good, and circumstances can change. We plan with confidence that reflects our heart and the practical realities of our lives but conscious that circumstances may change. Planning with flexibility, planning with confidence in the sovereign goodness of God, we do so in good faith and positively.

The challenge for us is to have faith in God in the uncertainty and adapt with flexibility if change is needed.

Every member ministry (v15-20)

(The household of Stephanas v15-18) The cameo about Stephanus and his household is moving and challenging. The household is his extended family, they were the first converts in Achaia (Corinth) What an encouragement that was to Paul and his ministry team. Stephanos and his household were the ones to visit Paul in Ephesus (v17) and their discussions about the church and their Christian faith have been a real encouragement to Paul. He commends them, for their ministry to him and to the church. In v15 we read, "*They devoted themselves to the service of the saints.*" One of the themes in the church advocated by Paul is every member ministry, illustrated by the body picture, and highlighted in Ch 12-14 of this letter. This cameo of Stephanos and his household, the ministry, encouragement and service of the saints is the model for each of us. When we think of all Jesus has done for us in his death and resurrection the challenge is our response. As it was last week (15:58) "*Always give yourself fully to the work of the Lord for you know your labour in the Lord is not in vain.*" Note that devotion encouraged in 15:58 is to the work of the church but here in 16:15 it is to

one another. It is the service of each other that encourages us and as families we build up the family of God. As the elders have been thinking about our strategy for the future, what we are clear about is the need to develop relationships within the church and our service of each other will encourage that strategy and is the church's work. Look at what such ministry did for Paul, it made him glad (v17) and refreshed his spirit. (v18) Let us do likewise.

(Aquila and Priscilla and the church that meets in their house v19) This verse builds on the knowledge we already have about Aquila and Priscilla. A Christian couple who made tents and travelled about the Roman empire. They had an international business and contacts. They used their business, travel and home to help establish and disciple churches in Corinth, Ephesus and Rome. What resources do we possess that we can use for ministry?

Since I have come to ARPC one repeated need in the city is for accommodation. God has resourced many of us with fine houses. How can we use that resource and others to help fellow believers and others in need? There is a great need for hospitality even in these restricted times and again we can be open to use our homes for ministry purposes.

The relationships in the church were important and they had a real concern and affection for each other, their brothers and sisters in the Lord. (v20) It is a lovely reality, and it is the essence of church life and ministry.

Jesus centred ministry

Paul ends his letter by taking the pen to write a greeting. Letters were mainly dictated, but to authenticate the letter, the author would write at the end. There were many false letters circulating, what we could call, ancient fake news and it was important to know this letter did in fact originate from Paul the apostle. (2 Thess 2:2)

Anathema and Maranatha

But by using the word “curse” or “anathema”, Paul shocks us! However, what he is saying is crystal clear, he is speaking to the church not unbelievers and saying if you do not love the Lord Jesus, then in covenant terms you are cursed. If your action and beliefs are unloving towards Jesus and his people you are “anathema” an enemy, abomination, cursed you are in a serious place and Paul has been warning some within the church in Corinth of such danger.

However, if you love the Lord Jesus you will want to see him and be with him, so the call is maranatha, Come O Lord! Love is the glue that holds the church together and God is love, love is personified in Christ Jesus. “*Do everything in love*” v14 Paul says! If we see the Amen in v24 as a late addition to the text, then the last words in the letter are “*in Christ Jesus.*” Do everything in Christ Jesus. Paul loves the church (its people), he urges them to experience the grace of Jesus, an extraordinary love, seen in the death of Jesus on the cross and he sends them his love, a self-giving, serving agape love, in Christ Jesus. Church ministry is always Jesus centred ministry. May we know his love and share his love. Amen.

Questions:

1. What principles for Christian giving are outlined here?

2. Future planning is difficult, what can we learn from Paul as he made plans?
3. What does this chapter and the letter as a whole highlight as important to Paul and to church ministry?