

# Living With Our Lens On - 1 Corinthians

## 16

### Introduction

- So here we are at last, at the end of the book of 1 Corinthians.
- This entire series, as we've walked through 1 Corinthians has been meant to show how looking at life through a "*Gospel Lens*" changes everything about the way that we view the world, and live our lives.
- Throughout this book, we've seen Paul apply this lens to so many different areas where the Corinthian church was struggling. He's addressed divisions within the church based on different teachers, divisions over class differences, sexual immorality in the church, and the list goes on.
- And for each area that we've looked at, Paul has shown us how the Gospel transforms that particular area of life, and helps the church to work through their problems.
- But we have to ask, what about life after those problems?
- Last week we looked at what really was Paul's final main point of his letter, looking at the glory of the resurrection, and now this final chapter of the book is essentially Paul giving some "house cleaning" instructions to the church, and some last thoughts before the letter wraps up.
- This is a pretty common thing to see in Paul's letters, that he often ends with some personal greetings, talking about his future plans, and giving a few last thoughts and instructions to the church that he didn't mention in the letter already. It's easy to skip over chapters like this, feeling like we've been through the meat of the letter, and all that's left is a list of names of people we don't know.
- But these conclusions can actually be incredibly significant, and really, what Paul does through these final instructions in 1 Corinthians is to show that the Gospel is not meant only to address individual problems, but to guide how the church lives and acts on an everyday basis.
- The "*Lens of the Gospel*" shouldn't just be used to address one particular issue, then taken off again until the next issue comes up. The truth of the Gospel is meant to have an ongoing impact on our everyday life, changing everything about the way that we live our lives as followers of Christ, and as a church.
- In this passage, Paul shows us a picture of what the church can and should look like when we live each day with our "*Gospel Lens*" on, and we're going to look at three examples that he gives of what that looks like practically in the life of the church.

## **It allows us to see the greater unity of the Church in Christ Jesus**

- The first thing that we see about how the church is called to operate is found mostly in the first 9 verses.
- Paul starts the chapter talking about the work that is going on in many different cities, the ministry that is happening there, and how the Corinthians are called to be involved with the churches in those cities. He begins with these words in V. 1:

*“Now concerning the collection for the saints: as I directed the churches of Galatia, so you also are to do.” - 1 Cor. 16:1 (ESV)*

- So he begins with talking about this “collection for the saints”. Specifically, this was an offering that was being taken up among many different churches to help poor and struggling Christians in Jerusalem. Paul points out that he said this same thing to the church of Galatia, and is now instructing the Corinthians to contribute to this offering.
- He wants the Corinthian church to be involved in caring for, and meeting the needs of other followers of Christ from different cities, and he gives specific instructions for how this should look in V. 2.

*“On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper, so that there will be no collecting when I come.” - 1 Cor. 16:2 (ESV)*

- This financial help was meant to be a regular part of the life of the church. Paul didn’t want to have to twist people’s arms when he showed up in Corinth to try to get support for the church in Jerusalem, he wanted the Corinthians each to make a regular practice of setting money aside to be used to support the church.
- And as he’s doing this, he is showing how living each day with a “*Gospel Lens*” on, allows us to see the greater unity of the church in Christ Jesus.
- A major theme throughout the book of 1 Corinthians has been Paul addressing the idea of unity within the Corinthian church. But he’s showing them that the principle of unity extends beyond just themselves. They’re not their own little pod of believers that’s completely isolated from all the other little pods of believers.
- Brian Rosner writes:
  - *“In part Paul’s project seems to have been intended to build a stronger sense of unity and solidarity among churches that may not have naturally tended to think of themselves as members of the very same family.”*

- Paul wanted the Corinthians to understand that they were all unified through Jesus Christ, part of the same spiritual family with all of these other churches because of the work of the Gospel in their lives. And part of what that unity looked like on a practical level was contributing financially to support the ministry that was happening in different cities other than Corinth.
- And beyond just being an act of generosity and kindness to other believers, to contribute to the ministry of the Gospel in other places actually helps the church to grow in health and avoid pride, and discouragement themselves.
- Mark Taylor writes:
  - *“Since pride nurtures a destructive self-sufficiency and autonomy, throughout the letter Paul has worked to encourage the Corinthians not to think of themselves as an independent group but as an organic part of a larger movement with some common traditions, values, and practices.’ The sooner they can recapture a wide vision of the work of the gospel, the better off they will be.”*
- When we take up our offering each week we make a point to say that the money that is given helps support the work of our church, as well as other churches and ministries in our community and our world.
- As we do this, we really are living out the intention of this passage, that our goal as a church is not just to financially support ourselves, but also to be invested in contributing to the various needs and ministries that are at work around our country and our world, in the same way that there are many other churches that give financially to support the ministry of Liberty Grace.
- We’re not just an isolated community on our own out here. When we look at our life, and our resources through the lens of the Gospel, we can see that we are a part of a larger community of the body of Christ, unified with believers all over the world, and this kind of financial support, giving to the ministry of the Gospel around the world out of the resources that God has blessed us with, is a way of expressing that beautiful unity we enjoy in Christ Jesus, and the Gospel.
- And it’s not meant to just be a detached kind of financial involvement, Paul wants the Corinthians to know about and be invested in the ministry that is going on elsewhere in the various cities that he has visited.
- From V. 5-9 Paul describes his travels through various different cities, making clear his intention to visit the Corinthians again, and spend some time with them. In V. 7 he says:

*“For I do not want to see you now just in passing. I hope to spend some time with you, if the Lord permits.” - 1 Cor. 16:7 (ESV)*

- But in V. 8-9 he says:

*“But I will stay in Ephesus until Pentecost, for a wide door for effective work has opened to me, and there are many adversaries.” - 1 Cor. 16:8-9 (ESV)*

- He wants them to know about the work that is going on in these different cities, so that they can be encouraged by what God is doing in the world around them, that a wide door for effective work was opened in Ephesus. When we hear that the Gospel is advancing in different parts of the world, and people are coming to know Christ, it should be such an encouragement and cause for rejoicing for us as a church.
- But Paul also wants them to know that as much as there is a wide door for effective work in Ephesus, he is also facing many adversaries to that work.
- And this should be a reminder that as much as we can be encouraged by the work that is going on around our world, and the effective ministry that God is allowing to take place, we should also be invested in praying for those who are sharing the Gospel in other parts of the country, or the world, because wherever the Gospel is being faithfully proclaimed, there will be opposition, and praying for those who are facing opposition is one of the greatest supports that we can give as a church.
- The unity of the church is really such an amazing thing. Darryl remarked a few weeks ago when he returned from Portland that it was nice to go almost anywhere and feel like you have family. Isn't that so cool? That no matter where you go, where there are followers of Christ, you have family.
- This is how the church is supposed to work. When we live every day with the *“Lens of the Gospel”* it allows us to see more and more the greater unity of the church in Christ Jesus.

## **It allows us to stand firm in a world of temptation**

- The second thing that comes with living each day with our “Gospel Lens” on, is that it allows us to stand firm in a world of temptation.
- It allows us to see the greater unity of the church, and it allows us to stand firm in a world of temptation.
- The *“Gospel Lens”* is not only meant to be crisis management for the church, something that we pull out after things have already gone wrong, and we're trying to figure out how to fix it, like a defibrillator, or an epi pen you pull out the wall when someone's having a heart attack or allergic reaction.
- As we've looked at this book we have seen the way that the Gospel gives hope and redemption in the midst of things that have gone off the rails, but it should also be helping us to grow in resisting the many different temptations that the world throws at us.

- Look at what Paul calls the church to in V. 13:

*“Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong.” - 1 Cor. 16:13 (ESV)*

- A number of commentators that I read this week pointed out that the force behind these words almost makes it feel like military instruction. Like Paul is a general instructing the troops on how to protect themselves in battle.
- Because remaining faithful to Christ and the Gospel in a world that is full of temptation and sin can often feel like a battle.
- We’ve mentioned a few times that Corinth specifically was known to be a place that was full of immorality, and thus, temptations that the church had to face, and it was a lot of those temptations and cultural influences that led to many of the issues that Paul wrote to address in his letter.
- But despite the wisdom that Paul has shared throughout the book, when it’s done, and the letter is finished, even if the church fixed each of the issues that Paul addressed, the reality of that difficult culture of temptation would continue on.
- Addressing the issues that the church was having would not remove all temptation from them. It was important to see how the Gospel helped them to deal with the issues that they were facing, but also learn that through the Gospel they were called to stand firm against future temptations, as well the temptation to fall back into old habits.
- Think of the church as someone in need of glasses, wandering around without them, and bumping into all sorts of obstacles as a result of not being able to see clearly. If the Corinthians were to put on their *“Gospel Lens”* to navigate around whatever obstacle they’d bumped into, yet immediately took that lens off again and tried to move forward, what’s the likelihood of hitting more obstacles?
- It wasn’t enough to just see how the Gospel provided answers to their individual problems, but to see how the Gospel was meant to guide every aspect of their lives, calling them to stand firm against whatever temptations the culture would send their way. The Gospel is not meant to change one area of our lives, but to completely transform how we see all of life.
- The same is true for us. If we come to church on a Sunday to put on our *“Gospel Lenses”*, to see how the Gospel might solve one particular problem that we’re facing, or speak into one particular area of our lives, yet we take that lens off as soon as we leave this building and try to live our lives the rest of the week without it, what’s going to happen when we face the temptations that our culture is constantly throwing at us?
- We’re going to be overwhelmed, and we won’t be able to stand firm in the way that we are called to. We live in a world where we constantly face temptation pretty much everywhere we

turn. The Gospel calls us to stand firm against those temptations, but we can't do that well if we compartmentalize the Gospel into one or two hours of our life each week.

- We need to be in God's word consistently, reminding ourselves of the truth of the Gospel, reminding ourselves of what it looks like to live our life with our "*Gospel Lens*" on, so that when temptations come, and they will, we will have what we need to stand firm against them.
- V. 14 then covers the second part of this point, as Paul instructs the church:

*"Let all that you do be done in love." - 1 Cor. 16:14 (ESV)*

- That one phrase there, really could sum up one of the biggest messages of 1 Corinthians as a whole, doing whatever you do, in love.
- It's a reminder that the life of the church should be defined by our love for one another, and that love should shine through in how we care for one another as we seek to stand firm on the Gospel in this world. We're not called to face the temptations of this world alone, but rather are given the gift of the local church community to be supported and encouraged as we seek to remain faithful to God in a messy world.
- It goes back to the point of unity, when we see that greater unity of the church, and are actively involved in showing the love of the Gospel to one another, it helps us to remember that we're not alone in standing firm against the temptations of this world.

## **It allows us to work humbly alongside one another for the cause of Christ**

- So Paul has already shown us that to live every day with our "*Gospel Lens*" on allows us to see the greater unity of the church in Christ Jesus, and to stand firm in a world of temptation, now finally, Paul shows us that living each day with our "*Gospel Lens*" allows us to work humbly alongside one another for the cause of Christ. This goes back a bit to the idea of unity that's been brought up a number of times throughout the book.
- If you remember, from the beginning of our series, there were a lot of different divisions within the church, some based on class and financial status, and some based around preferred teachers, one person preferring Paul, or Peter, or Apollos, and so on.
- And wherever those divisions existed, pride was always a significant factor. People were proud to say "I follow this person" or "I follow that person". Each group believed they were following the better teacher, and would look down on the other groups, or any different leader who tried to teach them.
- But in this passage Paul gives instructions on how the church is called to relate to a number of different people.

- In V. 10-11, Paul writes about Timothy, and this is what he says:

*“When Timothy comes, see that you put him at ease among you, for he is doing the work of the Lord, as I am. So let no one despise him. Help him on his way in peace, that he may return to me, for I am expecting him with the brothers.” - 1 Cor. 16:10-11 (ESV)*

- Then he mentions some others in V. 15-16

*“Now I urge you, brothers—you know that the household of Stephanas were the first converts in Achaia, and that they have devoted themselves to the service of the saints— 16 be subject to such as these, and to every fellow worker and laborer.” - 1 Cor. 16:15-16 (ESV)*

- It’s clear that Paul was anticipating some continuing issues with those that he’s mentioning, both Timothy, and the household of Stephanus, that people would look at them and think “Well you’re not Paul, and you’re not Apollos, so why do we have to listen to you?”
- But he tells the Corinthians to put Timothy at ease because he’s doing the Lord’s work, and to not despise him, but help him on his way.
- And as he mentions the household of Stephanas, he tells the Corinthians to be subject to them on account of their faithful service.
- Paul is warning the church here again at the end to avoid the divisions that he knew they were prone to, and rather to *“be subject to such as these, and to every fellow worker and laborer”*.
- The last thing that he wants the church to see here is that living each day with the lens of the Gospel allows us to work humbly alongside one another for the cause of Christ.
- And he gives himself as an example of how he wants the church to behave.

*“I rejoice at the coming of Stephanas and Fortunatus and Achaicus, because they have made up for your absence, for they refreshed my spirit as well as yours. Give recognition to such people.” - 1 Cor. 16:17-18 (ESV)*

- There was no pride in Paul’s words here. He’s not seeing himself as superior to these fellow believers, thinking that he’s above them so he has nothing to gain from them, or trying to keep them from leading so there’s more recognition for him.
- He tells the Corinthians to give recognition to those who faithfully serve Christ and the Gospel.
- And the same is true for us today. Church is not meant to be a popularity contest, where you treat people based on where they fall on some social ladder. We are all called to work together towards the common goal that we each have as followers of Christ, which is to advance the Gospel.

- And this connects back to Paul’s words about spiritual gifts earlier in 1 Corinthians, not seeing certain gifts as more important than others, but recognizing that God has gifted each person individually in order for the church to work together for the cause of the Gospel.

## **Conclusion**

- You can see how each of these things does connect back to things that Paul has already been teaching the church throughout the book of 1 Corinthians, dealing with the unity of the church, class divisions, and cultural temptations, yet he’s now showing them how those things that he’s already taught, should be continuing to impact their everyday lives, not just the individual issues that he was writing about.
- The Gospel is not meant only to address individual problems, but to guide how the church lives and acts on an everyday basis.
- It allows us to see the ongoing unity of the church in Christ Jesus, it allows us to stand firm in a world that is full of temptation, and it allows us to work humbly alongside one another for the cause of Christ.
- For the “*Gospel Lens*” to truly be effective in our lives, and for the things that we look at in God’s Word each Sunday to actually have lasting effect in us, we can’t just put this lens on when we walk into this building on a Sunday afternoon, or whenever we feel like we’re running into trouble. The Gospel is not meant to be a compartmentalized “part” of our life. Just as Paul has encouraged the church, the Gospel needs to be impacting and transforming every area of our life, each and every day.
- Then as he ends his letter, just as Paul has encouraged the Corinthians to be invested and informed about the various ministries going on in different cities, he sends them greetings from those other believers, showing yet another reminder to the church that they were not alone, and to encourage them that there were other Christians and churches who were thinking of them, and praying for them as well, reminding them one last time to embrace the greater unity of the church, stand firm in a world of temptation, and work humbly alongside one another for the cause of Christ, living each day with a “*Gospel Lens*”.
- The letter then ends with Paul’s final words, and as we close off our time of studying through 1 Corinthians together, I just want to end with reading this final benediction to you:

*“The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you. My love be with you all in Christ Jesus. Amen.” - 1 Cor. 16:23-24*