

Generosity and Hospitality Among the Saints

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[0 : 0 0] The Baptist missionary, who is considered the father of modern missions, set sail for India as a Christian missionary. But before he did, he was facing a band of brothers, a group of men who were also serving like he was.

And he said this to them, Well, I will go down if you will hold the rope. He was comparing Christian missionary work to that of the rescue efforts along treacherous mountain cliffs.

And there must be those who would bravely venture down the mountain, but there must also be those who would tenaciously hold the rope for them to be able to go down. And so one of the people in that gathering was Andrew Fuller.

At his home, the Baptist Missionary Society was formed in 1792. And for the next 21 years, he led this organization by recruiting missionaries, raising funds, writing periodicals with updates, and sending personal letters to missionaries in the front line.

During that period, his wife passed away as the aid of their 11 children. But Fuller persevered through this severe affliction and continued to hold the rope for the hope that the unleashed peoples in the world will come to know Jesus Christ.

[1 : 1 4] And for his ministry, Andrew Fuller became this archetype among missionary circles of the rope holder. In this closing section of Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, we see the importance of this rope-holding ministry.

And because Paul understood that there was a divinely ordained interdependence within the local church, but also there's a vital partnership that God ordained among churches, he knew that the cooperation of the Corinthian church was vital, that it was imperative that they cooperate with him for the advancement of the gospel.

So in this final section of his letter, he exhorts the Corinthian believers that those who love the Lord should be generous and hospitable toward the saints. That's the main point of this passage. And I'll talk about that in three phases.

Generosity for churches, hospitality for laborers, love for Christ. But before I do that, let me pray for us. God, we need your help. We ask that you speak to us. We acknowledge that this is your word and we want to be addressed by you.

Lord, please speak to us and change us so we may be conformed to the image of your son. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. So at the end of last week's passage, Paul exhorted the Corinthian believers to be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.

[2 : 3 3] Because death is not the final stop for the Christian, but because it's the gateway that opens the way for our future resurrection life, Paul believed that our labors were not in vain. And now in this passage, he gives some specific directions about how we can abound in the work of the Lord.

He begins in verse 1. Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I directed the churches of Galatia, so you also are to do. This is now the fifth time in the letter Paul is using the phrase, now concerning.

Whenever he uses that, he is indicating that he is addressing a new topic that the Corinthians themselves had brought up in their letter to Paul. So they had brought this topic up. Okay, so you mentioned this thing about the collection for the saints.

What are we supposed to do about it? So now Paul is addressing that and turning to that matter. And the fact that he hardly provides any detail about this collection shows that he has already addressed it. He assumes a lot of details that they already know it.

Only thing we see here is from verse 3 that the destination is in Jerusalem. And in several of his other letters, Romans 15, for example, 2 Corinthians 8-9, he mentions the same collection for the saints.

[3 : 40] And it was for the Jewish believers, the Jewish converts in Jerusalem who were impoverished. And he was taking up a collection for their sake.

And this was not some extraneous peripheral activity for Paul. Actually, this was a major aspect of Paul's third missionary journey. And this was important to him.

And he expended considerable time, energy, and relational capital toward making sure that this collection for the saints in Jerusalem was successful. And so even though here in 1 Corinthians, he's pretty matter-of-fact in the way he describes this, he's really emphatic in other places when he mentions this collection.

For example, he calls it an act of grace in 2 Corinthians. He calls it the proof of their love. He calls it the ministry of the saints.

He calls it a service. For Paul, this was much more than a fundraiser. It was an act of worship. It was a form of ministry. It was the natural and expected overflow of the love and grace that we have received from God.

[4 : 47] And James 2:15-17 says this, If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, Go in peace, be warmed and filled, without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that?

So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. If we don't seek to meet a tangible need that we see of a brother or sister in Christ, how can we claim to care for their intangible needs that we don't see?

If we don't care to fill their empty stomach, how can we claim to care for the nourishment of their souls? Paul was no advocate of faith, divorced from works, and he expected and encouraged the better-off Christians to supply the needs of the worse-off Christians.

And of course, as Christians, we're not just called to take care of other Christians. We're also called to love our neighbor as ourselves. But there is a particular call to love our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ because they belong to the same Lord, and we're accountable to one another.

Then in verse 2, Paul tells the Corinthians what a specific instruction to the churches of Galatia was. He says, follow with me in verse 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 there will be no collecting when I come.

[6 : 09] The first day of the week refers to a Sunday. The Jews historically worshipped on a Saturday, on a Sabbath, but Christians, because Christ rose from the dead on the first day of the week, as we see in Acts 27, they started to worship on the first day of the week, which is Sunday.

And so Paul is referring to the gathering. He may mean that when you gather, bring something to get set aside for the collection of the poor, but it probably more likely means he wants them to use Sunday as a reference point, to use that day, to set aside money privately, so they can bring it to the collection for the poor.

Because if the sentence is translated even more literally, he says, each of you by himself put something aside and store it up. So Paul is emphasizing that this is supposed to be voluntary, not compulsory.

You should, of your own accord, bring something, set aside something to bring to this collection for the saints. And each believer is to do this as he may prosper, it says. There's no defined amount that every believer is supposed to give.

Rather, each believer is to give as he may prosper, in accordance with how they have prospered for that week. Now, we could be tempted, some of us, to breathe a sigh of relief at this point quickly and say, Well, if that's the case, I guess I'm off the hook because I'm definitely not prospering.

[7 : 27] Other people should give, not me. But Paul didn't say only those who prosper should give. He said, each should give as he may prosper.

He expects everyone to give according to his or her means. It often happens that when our earning power increases, our standard of living increases proportionally, while our standard of giving does not.

It should be the exact opposite. Provided that we're maintaining a livable standard, when our earnings increase, we should prioritize increasing our standard of giving, rather than our standard of living.

Why store up treasures on earth, when you can be storing up treasures in heaven? That's the reality that we must live with in mind. Some people think that giving a flat percentage will solve this issue.

Since if we're giving a percentage, then we'll be giving according to our respective means. But note that Paul doesn't specify a percentage. In the Old Testament, believers were required to tithe, meaning to give a 10% of their income.

[8 : 36] But after Christ's death and resurrection, the New Testament never again mentions tithing. And this is because Christ has fulfilled the law. As it says in Romans 7, 6, But now we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captives, so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code.

Now, does that mean that our standard for giving in the New Testament is lowered? Not at all. The standard for the Christian is incomparably higher in every way, and that's why Jesus says in Matthew 5, 20, Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and the Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

Think about what Jesus taught in the Beatitudes in Matthew 5. For example, Jews were commanded not to murder. But he says to Christians, Not only are you not to murder, you're not even supposed to harbor anger against the brother.

because anger is the root of murder. And what does Jesus say about adultery? Jews were commanded not to commit adultery. But Jesus commands Christians, Not only are you supposed to commit physical adultery, you should never lust in your heart, because that is tantamount to adultery in your mind.

So a New Testament saint who has experienced the generosity and sacrifice of Christ should not be outdone by Old Testament saint who wasn't even filled with the Holy Spirit.

[10 : 00] We often ask, How much are we required to give? Because we have a legalistic mentality sometimes, and I must include myself in this, we want to fulfill the so-called requirement.

Well, just tell me how much I need to give, so I can give that and be done with it. But that kind of attitude is incongruous. It's not consistent with God's lavish grace and generosity toward us.

Instead of asking how much we have to give, we should be asking how we can order the affairs of our lives so that we get to give more. Christians give freely, joyfully, faithfully, and generously, not because we must, but because we love our Savior.

We give as God prospers us, but our posture is to give generously, sacrificially, not selfishly or stingily. And that's why in 2 Corinthians 8, 1-5, when Paul's again bringing this issue up to further motivate the Corinthian believers to give, he gives the example of the Macedonian believers.

We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia. For in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part.

[11 : 15] For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means of their own accord, begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints.

And this, not as we expected them, but they gave themselves first to the Lord, and then by the will of God to us. Our attitude should be likewise to be able to give.

What can we, how can we give more? What can we get, what do we get to give? Not, let's, let me do everything that I need and everything I want, and here's some spare change for the offering box.

And I'm not saying this for, necessarily for our church. Our church, you guys give, our church members give very faithfully. And the giving that Paul's talking about here is actually giving to another local church that's in need of other saints.

Verse 3 makes that explicitly. It says that it's for the saints in Jerusalem. So Paul's not speaking of the Corinthians' own church, but he's speaking to, of another church, another local expression of the universal church.

[12 : 22] So there is a biblical precedent that's here for strong partnership among churches across regions. And this is vital and healthy for the ministry of the church. And that's why my first point is called generosity for the churches.

And Paul continues his instructions in verses 3 to 4. And when I arrive, I will send those whom you accredit by letter to carry your gift to Jerusalem. If it seems advisable that I should go also, they will accompany me.

Paul wants the Corinthians themselves to choose a delegation that they will accredit to go and deliver this. Because obviously this is an important issue. It will probably be a sizable sum. There's no electronic transfers in this day and age.

So everything is carried in coins. That's not exactly easy to hide as you're traveling, right? So I mean, so there needs to be accountability. There needs to be safety. So there should be a delegation that is sent out. And if they should consider it necessary, maybe because the sum is too large, Paul himself, as the one in charge of the project, will also go with them.

So then having spoken of his arrival to Corinth, Paul goes on to give them a preview of his itinerary in verses 5 to 9. First he says, I will visit you after passing through Macedonia, for I intend to pass through Macedonia, and perhaps I will stay with you or even spend the winter, so that you may help me on my journey wherever I go.

[13 : 36] For I do not want to see you now just in passing. I hope to spend some time with you if the Lord permits. So this is pretty straightforward. Paul wants to visit the Corinthians. He's expressing that desire, but he wants to first pass through Macedonia, which includes Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea.

And he wants to do this not so that he can tour the areas, but because those are all places where he has planted churches. And he wants to care for the churches that are there. Only then he wants to come, because if he visits them now, it will have to be cut short for his later trip.

But he doesn't want to have a short visit with the Corinthians. He wants to come and stay a while. He'll even spend perhaps the winter there. And as he does that, his hope is that they may help him on his journey, he says, wherever he might go after visiting Corinth.

The phrase, help me on my journey, is the technical phrase that refers to furnishing all the needs of a traveling missionary. So it includes food, money, traveling companions as well.

So recall from 1 Corinthians 9, which we covered earlier, that Paul voluntarily gave up his rights to be compensated by the Corinthians for his ministry. He did that so that the gospel, he might present the gospel free of charge.

[14 : 46] And this was a point of contention between Paul and the Corinthian believers, because the Corinthian believers took offense to that. They took that as a sign that Paul didn't want them to partner with him and to share in his ministry.

And some of them mocked Paul saying, well, the reason why he doesn't accept our compensation is because he's not a worthy apostle. He doesn't deserve our compensation.

So that was a point of tension between the two. And so this seems to be kind of a conciliatory gesture on Paul's part. Hey, I know I'm not taking any compensation from you for my ministry among you, but hey, if you really insist on this, you can help me as I serve and minister to others.

You can furnish my missionary journey as I go on from your place. And so that brings me to the second point, hospitality for laborers. And Paul's closing comments in this letter encouraged the church to be hospitable toward those who labor among them, including, that's why he says, he hopes that they will furnish his missionary journey.

But for now, Paul says in verses eight to nine, I will stay in Ephesus until Pentecost, for a wide door for effective work has opened to me, and there are many adversaries.

[15 : 54] The reasons that Paul gives here are fascinating, aren't they? Look at, Paul gives, the reason that Paul gives for staying in Ephesus to serve, on the one hand is, a wide door for effective work has opened to me.

Well, that sounds like a sensible reason to stay in the same place and keep ministering, right? And we see an example of that in Acts 19. It says that God was doing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul, so much so that there were some Jewish exorcists, these traveling exorcists, magicians, who tried to appropriate the power that Paul had access to.

So they went to a demon-possessed man, and they said, by the name of Jesus, whom Paul proclaims, come out of this man. And then the demon was like, hey, I know Jesus, and I know Paul, but who are you?

And they attacked them, right? So after that happened, so there was this huge revival in Ephesus. It put the fear of God in people, and they brought out all their magical, you know, papazzis, all their magical manuscripts that burned them, and there was a revival among Christians, and a lot of unbelievers came to know Christ.

That's a wide door for effective ministries. The Spirit of God is moving. So Paul said, I need to stay here. I need to keep working. So that makes perfect sense. But the next reason doesn't make any sense. Right?

[17 : 06] He says, and there are many adversaries. Right? That would make you think, well, that doesn't sound like an effective, like wide open door for ministry.

I mean, there's a lot of adversaries, Paul. What do you mean it's a wide open door for ministry? But Paul says, Paul doesn't seem to see those two things as mutually exclusive. Rather, he seems to assume that those two things go hand in hand.

Yes, when there is a wide open, effective door for ministry, the enemy will be there to oppose you because it's effective. He expects that, and he says, because of this, I must persevere.

I must continue the work. So he does that, and before he arrives in Corinth, Paul knows that the Corinthians still need attention, and so he sends his apprentice, Timothy, to them.

He mentioned that he would do this earlier in chapter 4. And you can see that, this is why I sent you, Timothy, my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, to remind thee of my ways in Christ as I teach them everywhere in every church.

[18 : 09] The Corinthians were transgressing the ways of Christ. They were violating the things that Paul taught them, and so he was sending his apprentice, Timothy, to them to remind them of the ways of Christ.

But since there is obvious tension between him and the Corinthian church, Paul fears that they will receive Timothy coldly because he represents Paul. And he's afraid that he'll be disrespected and disregarded, so he adds this in verses 10 to 11 out of his care for Timothy.

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.

The phrase, put him at ease, is literally, see to it that he has nothing to fear. Don't make my son Timothy, not his literal son, his spiritual son, don't make my son Timothy apprehensive.

Don't make him anxious and nervous in your presence. Put him at ease. Furnish his needs. Help him on his journey. And these interactions show clearly that Paul and Timothy had fallen out of favor with the prideful Corinthians that Paul felt it was necessary to do this.

[19 : 30] But as we find out, as we already know from the earlier chapters, there was one person that the Corinthians did like quite a bit and they were eagerly awaiting his return.

And that person was Apollos. Apparently, the Corinthians, in their letter to Paul, after challenging his apostleship, had the audacity to ask him, hey, but we don't really need you to come back, but you can tell Apollos.

Please tell him because we're waiting for him. So he feels the need to address Apollos' visit and it's remarkable what he says. Look at verse 12. Now concerning our brother Apollos, I strongly urged him to visit you with the other brothers.

But it was not at all his will to come now. He will come when he has the opportunity. Isn't that amazing? Apollos was quite popular among the Corinthians.

He was described in Acts 18.24 as an eloquent man, competent in scriptures. And he was trained. He was trained in Alexandria, which was a center of learning and rhetoric in Greek civilization.

[20 : 41] So he knew how to speak. He knew how to teach. He knew how to command an audience. And the Corinthians liked him and liked the wisdom that he had. And they compared Paul unfavorably to that.

Considering this, Paul seems to be out of his mind. And he says, Now concerning our brother Apollos, I strongly urged him to visit you with the other brothers.

Given that the Corinthians are divisive and that they have an unhealthy attachment to Apollos, why would Paul ascend to sending Apollos to them again? If I were him, I would never let Apollos step foot in Corinth again.

Right? In my sinfulness, I would. This is a large-hearted gesture from Paul. And Paul reveals the profound unity that he and Apollos have with this gesture.

He said this earlier in chapter 3, verses 4 to 8. For when one says, I follow Paul and another, I follow Apollos, are you not being merely human? What then is Apollos?

[21 : 47] What is Paul? Servants through whom you believe as the Lord assigned to each. I planted Apollos' water, but God gave the growth. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth.

He who plants and he who waters are one, and each will receive his wages according to his labor. In spite of the Corinthians' attempt to pit Paul against Apollos, they themselves had great unity between them.

Because they were fellow servants of God, it was God who sovereignly chose to use them and he assigned to them whatever he saw fit. Paul calls Apollos our brother, a fellow worker.

There was no jealousy, rivalry, or contention between them. They knew they were on the same page, so Paul knew that even if he sent Apollos back, that Apollos would bring the necessary correction as he himself would. This is amazing to me because it shows that Paul wasn't concerned for his own ministry, his name, his reputation, but he was concerned for God's name, God's church, God's ministry.

It'd be like, I mean this is a very possible scenario because we have very gifted pastoral interns in our church, so imagine that this sort of happens. So I let one of our pastoral interns preach, which they do on a regular rotation basis, and every time this one pastoral intern preaches, everybody loves it.

[23 : 10] They're so blessed by it, he's faithful to the word, God uses it, and everyone wants to hear him preach more often. And when I preach, however, it's like, okay, same thing, I've heard this before, right?

So there's this kind of brewing tension, but in that situation, imagine if I said, oh, whoa, then if God's using him, he should preach more. Let's have him preach more.

Lord, that's exactly what's happening here. I mean, Paul is giving more air time to basically his rival from the eyes of the Corinthians because it's not about us. It's about God and his ministry going forward.

And so he addresses Paul's visit, but it seems that Paul himself doesn't really want to go. I can understand him because he said it was not at all his will to come now.

He will come when he has opportunity. So indefinitely delayed, right? Perhaps Paul himself was uncomfortable with the way he was being idolized by the Corinthians. We don't know that for sure, but for whatever reason, Paul has determined that it's not time for him to go back.

[24 : 19] So Paul has said that he cannot come to them now because he's ministering in Ephesus and he has said that Timothy is on his way, but he's not there yet. And he said that Apollos himself is refusing to go to Corinth.

So in the intervening period, however, they must persevere. So he exhorts them in chapter verse 13. Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong.

This is similar to what Paul said earlier in chapter 15, 1-2. Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved.

If you hold fast to the word I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. The Corinthians, in their doctrinal errors, but also in their sinful behaviors, were at risk of forfeiting their faith and failing to persevere until the end.

They were starting to give evidence of the fact that maybe they had believed in vain. They didn't have genuine faith to begin with. And so Paul says, be watchful. This refers to spiritual alertness, and it's often connected to the idea of being sober-minded.

[25 : 23] Don't fall asleep on this. Be alert, be engaged, be aware, lest you fall, and stand firm in the faith. Paul is here using the word faith to refer to the content of the faith.

Don't waver, don't be wishy-washy, stand firm in the faith. And the next two commands are also related to this idea, act like men, be strong. The phrase act like men, of course, distinguishes manly behavior from boyish behavior, as well as from womanly behavior, and it's connected to the idea of being strong and courageous.

It's a Greek expression that's commonly used in the context of exhorting soldiers in battle. Of course, that is not to say that women are all cowardly or incapable of being courageous and strong, nor is it to say that men are better than women, where this passage merely recognizes that men and women are different, and that in God's design, he has given to men and women different interdependent areas of specialization.

And of course, it's a spectrum, so if this man over here on this side, woman on this side, some men are on this end of the spectrum, and some women are on this end of the spectrum, so some women are going to have more masculine, seemingly masculine traits than men, and that's fine.

But the call for men to be men and call for women to be women still remain. It's their biblical mandates. But generally speaking, there are, as we can recognize, there are character traits that more frequently are associated with men and character traits that are more frequently associated with women, and there are instances when both men and women should exhibit masculine traits, and there are instances when both men and women should exhibit feminine traits.

[27 : 05] For example, 1 Thessalonians 2, 7, Paul writes, we were gentle among you, like the nursing mother taking care of her own children.

So Paul describes his own ministry as like a nursing mother. He had to display feminine traits in that context. But then shortly after, in the same passage, just a few verses later, he says, for you know how like a father with his children, we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God who calls you into his own kingdom and glory.

So I think Paul intentionally juxtaposes those two expressions to show that he displayed a full range of parental care for the church as the spiritual father.

And so this was an instance when he expressed masculine traits. So then this just shows us that there are times as Christians we have to display characteristically feminine traits as well as masculine traits and in this instance Paul's calling men and women to act like men, to be strong and stand firm and to courageously fight the fight of faith.

And as often he does, Paul adds in verse 14, let all that you do be done in love. As Paul taught in chapter 13, love is the supreme Christian virtue.

[28 : 26] It's what should undergird everything that we do and everything we do must be springing from love. So this is really kind of almost a summary exhortation. It covers everything that Paul has addressed up to this point regarding how they have failed to love one another.

And so he finally exhorts to let all that you do be done in love. I'll talk about this a little more as we go. And then after this, Paul turns to one more group of people that he wants to commend to the Corinthians, and it's the delegation of the Corinthian believers who had come to him to deliver the Corinthians letter.

It's the ones that are mentioned named in verse 17, I believe. And he says in verse 16, Now I urge you, you know, 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.

Be subject to such as these and to every fellow worker and laborer. The members of Stephanas' family were the first Christian converts of Achaia, and they had devoted themselves to the service of the saints.

The word service is the same word that's translated elsewhere in the New Testament as ministry. And we don't know exactly what kind of ministry this involved, because all Christians are called to some form of ministry, but it's possible that they hosted the church gathering at their house, they were the patrons of the house, of the house church.

[29 : 46] But the language of verse 16 strongly suggests that Stephanas, as the head of this household, served in some kind of leadership capacity, probably as an elder of the church that met with him.

Because verse 16 says, Be subject to such as these, and to every fellow worker and laborer. The language of being subject is used in 1 Peter 5.5 to say, Be subject to the elders.

I had this. And the word fellow worker is the same expression that Paul had used earlier to refer to himself and to Apollos in 1 Corinthians 3.9.

So the context suggests that Stephanas is involved in some kind of ministry and probably a role of an elder in leading the church. And Paul says, Not just to Stephanas, but to every such fellow worker and laborer.

Be subject. The fact that Paul feels the need to say this probably also suggests that Stephanas, his leadership was probably in jeopardy there as well. Probably because he was loyal to Paul and he was bringing this letter to him.

[30 : 51] And so in this passage, as you've seen, repeatedly, Paul enjoins the Corinthians to respect and to be hospitable toward the church leaders. He expressed his hope that they would furnish his missionary journey. He expresses hope that they would show the same for Timothy.

And now he says this for Stephanas. Why is this so important to Paul? It's not because the elders are these sages who know all the answers, so you should always follow everything that they say.

It's not because Paul or the elders are seeking power and they want to lord it over the congregation. Hebrews 13 17 says this.

Obey your leaders and submit to them for they are keeping watch over your souls as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning for that would be of no advantage to you.

You should be subject to them. Why? Because they are keeping watch over your souls as those who will have to give an account. He's saying it's a hard job and provided that they are doing what they're supposed to be doing, they're not doing it for themselves, they're doing it for you.

[32 : 01] They're serving you. And not only that, they're not their own bosses. It's easy to think of it that way because they don't have any human bosses above them, but it's worse than that. They have God as their direct boss.

They'll have to give an account to him, a holy God. And they're like these ancient stewards, right, who were servants of the master of the house, who was given charge, this derivative authority to have authority over the household, the marriage of the household, and even over their children.

But that was a derived authority, right? when the master of the house returned, they had to give an account. They didn't own anything in the house. Everything belonged to the master. These leaders of the church are like these stewards.

So their livelihood, their inheritance, their rewards, whether they will be commended by God or not in heaven, depends on how they serve you.

So let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you. The reason why Paul tells the churches to submit to the leaders is not because they are infallible, but precisely because they are fallible, because they are human, because they are sinful, because they are prone to discouragement, because they will fail miserably without your prayers and support, because they will face the Father on judgment day and have to give an account for every single person they were entrusted with.

[33 : 41] Paul continues that line of thought in verses 17 to 18, I rejoice at the coming of Stephanas and Fortunatus and Achaicus, because they have made up for your absence, for they refresh my spirit as well as yours.

Give recognition to such people. Stephanas and Fortunatus and Achaicus. So they're the ones that formed the delegation of the Corinthian church to go to Paul, and they have made up for their absence.

Paul's inability to be with the Corinthian church had left the gaping hole in his life, and this delegation, by representing the Corinthian church and coming to Paul, has made up for their absence, has filled up that gap for him, and he rejoices in that.

And he says, at one last time, give recognition to such people. Don't take them for granted. Don't neglect them, acknowledge them, recognize them. That kind of hospitality for laborers is vital for the health and ministry of the church.

That brings me to my final point, love for Christ. Paul brings his letter to a close with the final greeting in verses 19 to 24. He says, the churches of Asia send you greetings, Aquila and Prisca, together with the church in their house, send you hearty greetings in the Lord.

[34 : 50] All the brothers send you greetings. Greet one another with a holy kiss. So he sends greetings from everybody. He writes the churches of Asia, and hearty greetings from Aquila and Prisca.

Prisca is another name for Priscilla. They were actually at some point in the past members of the Corinthian church. Now they're laboring alongside Paul in Ephesus. And then he also says greetings from all the brothers, probably referring to all of Paul's traveling companions and fellow workers.

He only names one in chapter 1, verse 1, Sosthenes, but there's probably others. And he says to greet one another, and after sending their greetings, he tells the Corinthians themselves to greet one another with the holy kiss.

Now I don't think this means we need to greet each other with kisses. I don't know, maybe some of you guys come from a culture where they do that. Yeah, actually, Portuguese culture, yeah.

Because if you did that today after the service, that's going to be misunderstood because our culture has changed, right? So it doesn't convey the same thing that it used to convey.

[35 : 54] So we need to rather labor at preserving the principle that is there and not the cultural practice. And the principle is this, right? It's show affection.

Greet one another with affection. I don't think a professional handshake kind of cuts that. How can you show love for one another?

Greet one another enthusiastically. Look one another in the eyes. Ask how they're doing and be present with them. Embrace them if it's appropriate. High five if that's your preferred mode.

But greet one another. Show affection to one another. Then finally Paul writes his own greeting in verse 21. I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand.

That means up to this point someone else had been serving as a scribe, probably Sosthenes, but when it comes to the end he signs his own name to authenticate the letter because as we see in 2 Thessalonians 2.2 there were people who forged Paul's letters.

[36 : 58] And so he's trying to make sure that they know that this is from him. And with the pen still in hand, right after signing his name, Paul feels compelled to add one last bit of exhortation.

In verse 22, in his own hand, if anyone has no love for the Lord, let him be accursed. Our Lord, come. Earlier, he said in verse 14, let all that you be done in love.

And just after this, he says in verse 24, he reiterates his own love. My love be with you and all in Christ Jesus. Amen. So not only is Paul telling the Corinthians to love, he himself loves them.

And the reason why Paul used the language of love here is because love is the ultimate criterion of Christian obedience. The greatest commandment of Christianity is to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength.

love encompasses and undergirds all of Christian obedience. And for that reason, Paul is confident that the church in Corinth, those who truly love the Lord, will obey God's word and reform their ways.

[38 : 10] And those who do not love the Lord, he also knows that they will not. So he says, let them be accursed. Those who do not love the Lord will incur the judgment of the Lord who is coming soon.

So he says, our Lord, come. Do you have love for the Lord? Here's a helpful diagnostic question for you to ask. If you're already a Christian, ask yourself this.

Do you find yourself serving and obeying God out of a sense of duty? Merely because you feel that you have to, but not because you want to?

That's a warning sign that you need to check your engine room. love is the engine of Christian life and obedience. Maybe you're running out of fuel. Are you freshly amazed by the grace of God?

Are you daily aware of God's love for you? Another question you can ask is, do you love your Christian brothers and sisters? Because love for God always flows out into your love of your brothers and sisters.

[39 : 11] Or are you prone to withdraw from them? C.S. Lewis puts it this way, a perfect man would never act from the sense of duty.

He'd always want the right thing more than the wrong one. Duty is only a substitute for love of God and of other people. Like a crutch, which is a substitute for a leg. Most of us need the crutch at times, but of course it is idiotic to use a crutch where our own legs, our own loves, tastes, habits, can do the journey on their own.

The love for Christ which flows into our love for others is the ultimate benchmark of Christian faithfulness. But how can we stir this up and how can we grow in our love for Christ?

I've mentioned before that Paul begins all 13 of his letters with some form of greeting that involves grace to you. And he concludes all 13 of his letters with some form of blessing that involves grace be with you.

And he does the same here in verse 23. The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you. Paul's aim in the whole letter is to bring the grace of the Lord Jesus to them and then to leave them with the grace of the Lord Jesus.

[40 : 30] To bring them to with their appetite with the grace of the Lord Jesus and to leave the taste of it in their mouths. We love because he first loved us.

1 John 4.19 The grace of the Lord Jesus is a gift, not a payment. It comes freely from the love of Christ. It's not something that we can earn with our love for him and our good deeds on his behalf.

The ultimate expression of this free gift of God, the grace of God, the love of God we've received is seen in the cross of Jesus Christ. Even though we deserve to pay the penalty for our sins and die, Christ died in our stead so that we might live.

That's the grace of the Lord Jesus. This story was once related to me. It's a true story by, it was told by this boy's grandfather.

It's from, it happened, they're part of a church in Cincinnati, Ohio. The mother of a nine-year-old boy named Mark, this is the boy that received a phone call in the middle of the afternoon. It was a teacher from son's school.

[41 : 37] And Mrs. Smith, I think that's a made-up name because they don't want to reveal their name. Something unusual happened today in our school, in your son's third grade class. Your son did something that surprised me so much that I thought I had to contact you immediately.

The mother began to grow worried and then the teacher continued, nothing like this has happened in all my years in teaching. This morning I was teaching a lesson on creative writing and as I always do, I tell the story of the ant and the grasshopper.

The ant works hard all summer, stores up plenty of food, but the grasshopper plays all summer and does no work. The winter comes, the grasshopper begins to starve because he has no food, so he begins to beg, please, Mr.

Ant, you have so much food, please let me eat too. Then I said, boys and girls, your job is to write the ending of the story. Your son, Mark, raised his hand, teacher, can I draw a picture?

Well, yes, Mark, you can draw a picture, but only after you write the end of the story. As in all the years past, most of the students said the ant shared his food through the winter, and both the ant and the grasshopper lived.

[42 : 45] A few children wrote, no, Mr. Grasshopper, you should have worked in the summer, now I have just enough food for myself, so the ant lived and the grasshopper died. I think that's how the actual story goes, right?

I don't remember, but your son ended the story in a different way from any child ever. He wrote, so the ant gave all of his food to the grasshopper. The grasshopper lived through the winter, but the ant died.

And he drew a picture of three crosses. That's what Christ did for us, by dying on the cross.

He took our place, our sins, which deserved the penalty of death, our failures, our shortcomings. He pays for it and dies in our stead.

That's the grace that now motivates us. That's the grace that stirs our love for Christ. That's the love for Christ that moves us toward hospitality for our labors and generosity for the churches.

[43 : 53] Take a moment of science to reflect on that. God's we have an opportunity today to express our generosity toward churches that are in need.

Once a year, the churches within our denomination hold Mission Fund Sunday when we take up an offering for a denomination-wide mission fund.

This fund is used to fund church plans throughout the world. When we first launched our church, we actually received funding from this same fund as well. There's actually a short five-minute video that talks about that, but we're not going to show it today because we're running late.

We could show it to you next week if there's time for it. Basically, in that video, you'll see Stephen Bone, who is a friend of mine, a pastor friend. He went to the same seminary that I went to, not at the same time, here in Gordon-Kamal, Boston.

He and his wife have a big heart for urban ministry. inner-city ministry. They live in a neighborhood with a lot of poverty and drug addiction. Just to give you a glimpse of it, the neighborhood that they serve is called Frankfort, Pennsylvania.

[45 : 05] Their median household income is \$29,000. Compare that to the \$99,000 in Cambridge and \$112,000 in East Cambridge. We do have our own needs, but their need is of a different order.

We're going to pray for them too in the prayers of people. Whoever is leading prayers of people, you can come up now. We're going to pray for that church and I'll tell you guys how you can give toward the mission fund at the end of the service.

Thank you. Thanks, Dan.