

## **I CORINTHIANS: HANDLING BELIEVERS' PRACTICAL PROBLEMS**

### **XIX. Handling Interpersonal Conflicts In Ministry**

**(1 Corinthians 16:5-24)**

#### **I. Introduction**

- A. The people Paul discipled in Corinth lived in a city that was known for its immorality, alcoholism and worldly pursuits (Ryrie Study Bible, KJV, 1978, "Introduction to the First Letter of Paul to the Corinthians: The City of Corinth," p. 1619), so the formidable influence of the city's culture on the Corinthian believers left Paul addressing "(a)berrant beliefs and practices of an astonishing variety" in his letters to them, *Ibid.*
- B. However, in a vision Paul received from God as he ministered at Corinth in Acts 18:10b NIV, God told him, "I have many people in this city," so Paul was to keep on ministering regardless of the trials he faced there.
- C. Since the local church functions in a spiritual war zone (cf. Matthew 13:1-52), personal conflicts between God's messengers, between God's people and between believers and the world are to be expected. Paul faced several such conflicts as reported in 1 Corinthians 16:5-24, so we view them for our insight and edification:

#### **II. Handling Interpersonal Conflicts In Ministry, 1 Corinthians 16:5-24.**

- A. Paul alluded to five different kinds of interpersonal conflicts in the ministry in 1 Corinthians 16:5-22:
  - 1. He mentioned that he faced conflict with the godless world in his ministry, 1 Corinthians 16:5-9:
    - a. After informing his readers of his travel plans Lord permitting in verses 5-7, Paul announced that he would continue to minister at Ephesus until the Hebrew feast of Pentecost, 1 Corinthians 5:8.
    - b. His reason for remaining in Ephesus for some time was twofold – that "a wide door for effective work" had opened up for him, and that there were "many adversaries," 1 Corinthians 16:9 ESV.
    - c. These adversaries likely included unsaved the idol-makers whose business was threatened by Paul's evangelistic ministry (cf. Acts 19:23-41), and Paul wanted to strengthen believers there against such foes.
  - 2. Paul also alluded to a conflict between believers at Corinth and young minister Timothy, 1 Cor. 16:10-11:
    - a. The apostle directed his readers to put Timothy at ease when he came to them, reminding them that Timothy did the same work as Paul, 1 Corinthians 16:10 ESV.
    - b. No one was to despise Timothy, but to help him on his way to Paul with other believers, 1 Cor. 16:11.
  - 3. Paul mentioned a conflict between himself and Apollos, another leader in the Early Church, 1 Cor. 16:12:
    - a. The Apostle Paul had strongly urged Apollos to visit his readers at Corinth with the other brothers, but contrary to Paul's urging, Apollos did not at all want to visit at that time, 1 Corinthians 16:12a.
    - b. Thus, Paul wrote that Apollos would come to Corinth when he had opportunity to do so, 1 Cor. 16:12b.
  - 4. Paul sought to avoid a possible conflict within the church between fellow believers, 1 Cor. 16:15-16:
    - a. He urged his readers to subject themselves to the household of Stephanas since they were the first converts to Christ in Achaia and because of their devotion to the service of the saints, 1 Corinthians 16:15-16a.
    - b. Paul also directed his readers to be subject to every fellow worker and laborer, 1 Corinthians 16:16b.
  - 5. Paul ordered his readers to expel from their Church all apostates, 1 Corinthians 16:22a:
    - a. If anyone had no love for the Lord, he was to be "anathema," 1 Corinthians 16:22a.
    - b. This word meant "devoted to destruction," and "was accompanied by excommunication," what in this case involved removing unsaved denouncers of Christ, i. e., apostates, from the Church. (*Ibid.*, fn. to Gal. 1:8)
- B. Paul also taught his readers the proper actions in addressing these conflicts, 1 Cor. 16:13-14, 17-21, 23-24:
  - 1. He urged his readers to conduct themselves with spiritual sturdiness in the faith, 1 Corinthians 16:13:
    - a. The apostle told his readers to "(b)e watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong" (v. 13 ESV).
    - b. Watchfulness referred to watching for angelic conflicts (cf. Ephesians 6:10-12 with 18) as did standing firm in the faith (cf. 1 Peter 5:8-9) that Paul's readers not suffer Satanic defeat in interpersonal conflicts.
    - c. The calls to act like men and be strong were achieved by trusting the Lord and relying on the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit to function well in interpersonal conflicts, cf. 2 Timothy 2:1 with 2 Timothy 1:6-14.
  - 2. Paul urged his readers to show love in all things, 1 Corinthians 16:14. One can turn defensive and divisive because of interpersonal conflicts, but godly love retains a commitment to other believers, Eph. 4:15-16.
  - 3. Paul repeatedly emphasized the value of believers helping each other in the Lord, 1 Cor. 16:17-21, 22b-24.

**Lesson:** *In addressing various interpersonal conflicts in the ministry, Paul urged that they be handled by the believer's spiritual sturdiness in the faith, by godly love, and by helping other believers in the Lord.*

**Application:** *May we use a sturdy faith, a godly love and help each other to handle interpersonal ministry conflicts.*