

1Corinthians 16:15-18      "Submission that Leads to Refreshment"

1CO 16:15-18 "You know that the household of Stephanas were the first converts in Achaia, and they have devoted themselves to the service of the saints. I urge you, brothers, 16 to submit to such as these and to everyone who joins in the work, and labors at it., 17 I was glad when Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus arrived, because they have supplied what was lacking from you, 18 For they refreshed my spirit and yours also. Such men deserve recognition."

With all of the problems the Corinthians were embroiled in, from selfishness, to sexual impurity, to misuse and abuse of the gifts of the Spirit, it is quite apparent that much of this attitude came from their reluctance to listen to and heed the words of those leaders in their midst who were admonishing them from the word of God.

In fact, some of these people had become arrogant toward Paul, and so you can imagine they would have been arrogant toward the existing leaders in Corinth, adding even more tension to an already volatile situation. Paul addressed this earlier in this letter.

1CO 4:18-20 "Some of you have become arrogant, as if I were not coming to you., 19 But I will come to you very soon, if the Lord is willing, and then I will find out not only how these arrogant people are talking, but what power they have., 20 For the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power."

Some of these people believed their power was greater than Paul's or other leaders there in Corinth. And by power, we must differentiate between spiritual power and political power. The problems in Corinth were of a political power struggle as some had tried to gain an advantage. Of course the power Paul speaks of usurps any other power because his power was of a spiritual nature as the Spirit of God was working through him.

Now, it's not as though there was no one in Corinth who was taking the lead in trying to reign in the rebellious posture of many of these Corinthian Christians, but when your words fall on deaf ears there is little else to do in some cases but to defer to someone who has more power and authority to come in and deal with the problem themselves.

And of course, this is where Paul comes in. And this very letter is the direct result of a representative group from Corinth who came to Paul for help to settle the factious undercurrent in this church at Corinth.

Since Paul was not in a position to go to Corinth any time soon, the next best thing was to write a letter in response to the letter this representative group brought from Corinth. In the letter from Corinth there were a number of questions and concerns they wanted answers to and the bulk of this letter from Paul is answering those questions and concerns.

But as Paul ends this letter he reminds the church there in Corinth that they need to consider the ministry the Lord has given to those leaders in Corinth and submit to those leaders for the sake of peace and unity, and for the sake of representing Christ as the head of that church. And so, he begins by reminding them of one group of leaders in verses 15 through 18.

1CO 16:15-16 "You know that the household of Stephanas were the first converts in Achaia, and they have devoted themselves to the service of the saints. I urge you, brothers,, 16 to submit to such as these and to everyone who joins in the work, and labors at it."

Stephanas was one of the first Gentiles in Greece who was sold out to the work of Jesus Christ, and though we're told that his household was part of the first converts in Achaia, this doesn't necessarily mean they were the very first people in all of Achaia to be saved.

We know, for example, that one of the first stops for Paul in Achaia, which is modern day Greece, was Athens. And it was in Athens where we're told in ACT 17:34 "A few men became followers of Paul and believed. Among them was Dionysius, a member of the Areopagus, also a woman named Damaris, and a number of others."

And so, Paul's point is not that Stephanas is the absolute first, but that in the region of Corinth he is, and that not just as an individual, but as an entire household. It could be that his household was the first to come to Christ in all of Achaia.

And so, what Paul is establishing is the fact that the Lord has definitely been working in this man and his household, and the fruit of his life in Christ bears this out. In fact, Stephanas is one of

those mentioned in the beginning of this letter who was personally baptized by Paul.

1CO 1:16 "(Yes, I also baptized the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I don't remember if I baptized anyone else.)"

Stephanas was an established worker in that church. And this is where Paul is going. He builds the case that Stephanas, along with his household, which in all likelihood included his wife and children along with brothers and cousins, all of whom were people of conviction and action.

Notice the language Paul uses in verse 15.... "they have devoted themselves to the service of the saints."

Stephanas, and those who served with him, were not in ministry for any self-gain. They didn't figure out one day that they could make money and achieve power by being leaders in this church. They devoted themselves to serving the saints, not themselves or their pockets.

By the way, the word, devoted, in the Greek is *tasso* and it essentially means to "set in order." The implication is to ordain, assign, or appoint. It's the same word Luke uses in Acts 13:48 where it says, "... and all who were *appointed* for eternal life believed."

In other words, Stephanas and his household viewed themselves as appointed By God to serving the saints. Now, this doesn't mean that one day they stood up in the congregation and declared that we have decided we will be the leaders and you must follow us. No. What this says is that they were not appointed by any particular person to assume a role of service. They were not coerced into working hard for the saints.

They simply served because of their love for Christ. No one had to push them into it. Undoubtedly, Paul recognized their service and then possibly appointed them, in an official capacity, to be elders and deacons.

We have a tendency to get this backwards in the church-at-large today. It's not uncommon in some churches to find a potential candidate who has a temperature of 98.6, without any regard for their desire to show their gifts in acts of service, and then they appoint them to an office and hope they'll become good elders and deacons.

The biblical way of appointing elders and deacons is to recognize someone who is already serving in that capacity while ministering to the body of Christ through their teaching or their desire to nurture the saints by actually meeting the needs of the saints.

Along with that, to observe them over a period of time to see how faithful they are to the task, and then simply acknowledge their gifts and labors by appointing them to such leadership offices after recognizing that they're doing the work.

This is why you won't find me creating a job to minister to the saints and then volunteering someone by plugging them into that position hoping they'll be devoted to it. Nine times out of ten, they won't. This doesn't mean we don't make everyone aware of certain needs, like the children's ministry, and put out a call for someone to come forward.

But, whenever we have volunteered people to help in a certain capacity, it has always resulted in that person doing it for a short time and then stepping down. This was not the case with Stephanas. The Lord had impressed upon him to volunteer, to step forward and to assume the role of a worker and a leader, but never at the expense of someone else's authority, like Paul's.

When Paul had certainly recognized Stephanas' leadership qualities no one was surprised, because he was already demonstrating himself as a leader. Paul didn't have to go to Stephanas and beg him to instruct the church on the basics of the faith, for example. Stephanas saw the need and said to Paul, 'let me help the saints better understand their faith. Let me share with them what the Lord has taught me.'

Leaders are appointed because they're already doing, not talking about wanting to do. And through their doing they are living the life given to them by Christ in such a way as to show the saints what it means to be holy and righteous. This is why the apostles could go to the early church and ask them to choose seven men who were godly and doers of service.

ACT 6:3-4 "Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them, 4 and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word."

Those people in the early church didn't have to guess who might be a good candidate for service. They already knew who was full

of the Spirit and who had wisdom as their lives were a living testimony already in service to the saints with these qualities.

And by the way, when Paul says that Stephanas and his household were devoted to the service of the saints, the word service is a Greek word we're all familiar with as it comes over into English as deacon; it's the Greek word *diakonia*.

It simply means service, or ministering, especially of those who execute the commands of others. And so, in the broad sense we are all called to be deacons and deaconesses, as we serve and minister to the body of Christ with our gifts. Now, when it comes to the office of deacon, where one rules over others in their service as deacons, that office is limited to men according to the word of God.

But to suggest that women can't serve or be involved in supporting those rulers of such offices, as they carry out many of the duties of deacons, is to miss the importance of how women can and must serve in the body of Christ.

But back to Paul's point here in our text. With all of this said about Stephanas' devotion to serve the saints as a leader at the church of Corinth, he then places a responsibility back into the laps of the church, according to verse 16.

15 "I urge you, brothers,..., 16 to submit to such as these and to everyone who joins in the work, and labors at it."

It has been obvious up to this point that the church there in Corinth has not listened to Stephanas or the other leaders or submitted to their authority. They have chosen to dishonor the leaders Christ has placed in their midst for their edification.

Paul wants the believers in Corinth to submit to such leaders as Stephanas. This is not a request. This is a command that Paul is giving under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Submission is not a new concept for the church. Godly submission is something we all must accept in its various forms.

ROM 13:1-2 "Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God., 2 Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves."

EPH 5:21 "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ."

COL 3:18-22 "Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord., 19 Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them., 20 Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord., 21 Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged., 22 Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything; and do it, not only when their eye is on you and to win their favor, but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord."

And of course, our ultimate submission must be to our God and Savior.

JAM 4:7 "Submit yourselves, then, to God....."

And so, when Paul commands such submission to the church in Corinth in regard to their leaders he is doing so because it is by God's design, and for the edification of the church of Christ. And this is why the Spirit of God had the writer of Hebrews pen these words.

HEB 13:17 "Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you."

In other words, not to submit to the authority given by Christ to His shepherds will actually undermine the spiritual advancement of the church, which includes the individuals of that church who might be in the process of not submitting to their leaders.

It's not a power trip, and it's not a political move if a leader expects only what the Lord has already ordained. Does this mean there has never been a leader in the church over the last 2,000 years who has abused this authority or power? Of course not. But when a leader is devoted to serving the body as they are devoted to the will of God then it should be accepted as a working out of the will of God for that church.

And if a leader is dedicated to that end then you can be assured that the Spirit of God will certainly be involved in the life of that individual to where they will be sensitive to the leading of the Spirit. And in this way the congregation can trust Christ's choice of leaders for any particular church as their desire is to be devoted to the saints.

This was the case for Stephanas. And what Paul is doing is rebuking the Corinthians for not listening to such leaders and trusting Paul's choice of Stephanas as the Spirit has confirmed that choice.

One last point here before we move on. Paul adds a word to our text in verse 15 as it relates to the zeal Stephanas had, and which every leader should have when it comes to serving the saints. He says, "... submit to such as these and to everyone who joins in the work, and labors at it."

When Paul adds, "and labors at it," it is actually one word which in the Greek means to grow weary, tired, exhausted (with toil or burdens or grief), to labor with wearisome effort."

The point is not that we should expect our leaders to be burned out doing the work, rather the implication is that they are willing to do anything and everything to accomplish the work, even if it means laboring to the point of exhaustion.

Paul recognized in Stephanas and the other leaders in Corinth that they were willing to labor in this way and they did this because of their love for Christ who called them to such work. And this is why they must be submitted to.

Now, to show his appreciation of such leaders and their work Paul then continues in the next verse.

1CO 16:17-18 "I was glad when Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus arrived, because they have supplied what was lacking from you., 18 For they refreshed my spirit and yours also. Such men deserve recognition."

One of the things that Paul loved was to be in the company of fellow workers. And the reason he loved their company is because they had a common ground which allowed them to share what the Lord was doing in their respective ministries. But more than that he loved being around people who were sold out for Christ.

We all love being in the company of other believers because of our common bond in Christ, but there's something special about being with another believer who is excited about serving the Lord and wants to spend some quality time talking about it and gleaning from other believers different ways in which they can better walk with Christ.

It doesn't mean we can't enjoy other aspects of fellowship which has to do with our involvement in life, be it sports or our jobs or other activities we might be engaged in. I for one, enjoy talking about a variety of things outside of the bible and ministry. But, I also don't want to neglect an opportunity to minister to other believers by leaving out that most important aspect of Christian fellowship which includes being a servant of Christ.

Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus were evidently the kind of men who loved sharing what the Lord was doing in their lives and this excited Paul. Most of Paul's ministry involved disappointment from both believers and non-believers in one form or another. He seemed to spend a great deal of time and effort putting out fires in many cases and trying to start fires at other times as he tried to motivate the church to burn with a zeal which could not be quenched as they set about serving the Lord.

And so, to have godly men travel as far as they did to not just bring bad news about some of the things that were going on in Corinth, but to also share with Paul their dedication to continue to serve the people in Corinth, no matter how crazy things were, had to lighten the burden for Paul, knowing that he wasn't in this alone and that he could depend on faithful servants for Christ who weren't going to quit.

We get a glimpse of how happy Paul was to see these old friends, his first converts to Christ in Achaia as a result of his ministry to Corinth, in the word he uses at the beginning of verse 17. "I was glad." A better translation might be, I rejoice.

Every leader in the church needs to be ministered to and Paul was no exception. He rejoiced in the opportunity to spend time with these men and to hear what the Lord was doing in their lives. In them coming to Paul, we see that they supplied what was lacking on the part of those believers in Corinth, according to verse 17.

Now, what was lacking is not made clear. Some suggest that it might be the funds Paul needed to continue his ministry and that these men either brought money from the church at Corinth or that they themselves took out of their own pockets to supply what was lacking.

But the context could certainly include something as simple as the refreshment of being in the company and fellowship of believers who are like minded and who are not going to try Paul's patience, but rather are there only to encourage Paul.

In fact, the next verse lends to this idea as he addresses this refreshment which Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus bring him.

1CO 16:18 "For they refreshed my spirit and yours also. Such men deserve recognition."

What Paul is doing here is making a point about the effectiveness of the ministries of these men as leaders in Corinth. Part of any ministry must include the ability to refresh the body of Christ.

Strong's Concordance defines this Greek word for refresh in this way; "to cause or permit one to cease from any movement or labor in order to recover and collect his strength."

Now how is this done? Well, in Paul's case it involved the assurance that these men were going to continue the work and that Paul didn't have to worry about the future of the church at Corinth as long as these men were there.

It doesn't mean that Paul is so naive as to think that there would never be any more problems at Corinth, only that the Lord's servants were there and that God was still going to be involved as His Spirit and His word was placed there to be a safeguard.

This assured Paul that no matter how much the enemy would come against that church that there would be soldiers of Christ who were going to stand their ground in the power of the Spirit and that the work would go forward.

Any military commander who has ever had subordinates under him can appreciate the importance of having men who will stand their ground and will not give up and will carry out with zeal the orders given them. This takes a tremendous amount of worry off of their shoulders as others help to carry out the task at hand. This alone refreshes and allows one to gain new strength.

But Paul also says that these men refresh the church at Corinth. And the phrase he uses is actually, "refreshed my spirit and yours." This refreshing goes way beyond physical refreshment, though that could certainly be included. The refreshing here has more to do with the spiritual side of any believer.

And so, these men were actually successful to some extent in refreshing the spirits of these Corinthians. The way in which they did this had to do with their ability to help them see God's will according to His word.

How else can we refresh spiritually unless it is a spiritual source? Now, it's true that spiritual refreshment comes in a variety of forms according to the word of God. We can refresh each other as we come along side one another to comfort, or to encourage.

We can refresh each other spiritually as we live godly lives which can benefit other believers who need that example to follow themselves. We can refresh spiritually as we take God's word and help others see how it applies to their lives.

And evidently, this is exactly what Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus were doing. And so, what Paul is reminding these Corinthian believers of is that these men are doing the work of the Lord. If they can refresh Paul they must certainly be capable of refreshing the church and actually were doing such work.

And if they were doing the work they must then do as Paul says at the end of verse 18; "Such men deserve recognition."

Now, what is Paul saying here? Is he saying that the church should gather around these men and throw a party in their honor? Is he saying that the best way to recognize these men is to build a shrine or statue in their honor?

Not at all. He is saying that the church must recognize that they are more than fellow believers who are part of the same church. They must recognize their calling by God and their gifts and ministries as being given by God.

In other words, the church must take note of the fact by examining their lives that they are a special group of men who have been chosen by Christ with the believers of Corinth in mind. The Lord has given them Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus, and others like them, to build them up in their faith.

This is what the Greek word for recognize suggests. It actually means to know thoroughly, to know accurately, and to know well.

Paul is saying to take the time to recognize God's choice of a leader by taking the time to understand the responsibilities of that leader and then take the effort to support their ministry; to build that leader up instead of tearing him down.

That doesn't mean a leader is infallible or unapproachable. But it does mean that to undermine that leader is to undermine the work of Christ Himself, as that leader is doing his ministry as unto the Lord.

And up to this point this is precisely what the Corinthians were doing. They were undermining the ministry of these men, and therefore of Christ, as they dishonored them and would not submit to them.

I'm sure, in some frustration, these leaders got together with like-minded believers and set out with a letter to Paul to help in their situation so that the work of Christ would not be thwarted. Again, this shows us how much these leaders loved the Lord as they loved the sheep.

They didn't travel all that distance because they wanted to keep themselves in power. They traveled that distance because they couldn't stand to see the enemy get the upper hand in Christ's church through people who only thought of themselves. They loved the flock of Christ too much to see that happen. And so, they decided to protect the sheep in the only way they could. "Paul help us."

And yet, in their desire to receive help from Paul they end up ministering to Paul. Isn't that just like God? If the Corinthians had just been more concerned with their own lives and their own ministries, they wouldn't have had as much time worrying about or tearing down the ministries of others like Stephanas.

The Lord has called every believer in Christ to be a servant. And so, we need to be about serving each other and the world. If we see a need let's try and meet it. If we see an opportunity to share our faith, or to comfort then let's not wait for someone else to do it, let's take the initiative and do it ourselves.

And if we need help, let's not hesitate to ask for it. We're in this together, and as long as we recognize this our desire will be to want to serve each other and strengthen each other and to renew each other in the Lord. Always think of yourself as a refresher and be about refreshing and encouraging in all we do for each other.