

From The Pulpit Of



IMMANUEL
BAPTIST
CHURCH

The First Day

No. 41
Series: 1 Corinthians

1 Corinthians 16:1-4

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Text

16 Now concerning the collection for the saints: as I directed the churches of Galatia, so you also are to do. 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. ³ And when I arrive, I will send those whom you accredit by letter to carry your gift to Jerusalem. ⁴ If it seems advisable that I should go also, they will accompany me.

Introduction

There's a document from the second century, probably around the 150s AD, that was written by a Christian who is known as Justin Martyr to a non-Christian (the Roman Emperor in fact), trying to explain Christianity to him. It was penned 100 years or so after the apostolic writings of the NT like 1 Corinthians. So it's not inspired Scripture. It's not inerrant or authoritative. But it does give us a little window into what early Christianity looked like. Here's a description from the end of that document. Justin Martyr writes:

[O]n the day called Sunday there is a meeting in one place of those who live in cities or the country, and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read as long as time permits. When the reader has finished, the president in a discourse urges and invites [us] to the imitation of these noble things. Then we all stand up together and offer prayers. And, as said before, when we have finished the prayer, bread is brought, and wine and water, and the president similarly sends up prayers and thanksgivings to the best of his ability, and the congregation assents, saying the Amen; the distribution, and reception of the consecrated [elements] by each one, takes place.... Those who prosper, and who so wish, contribute, each one as much as he chooses to. What is collected is deposited with the president, and he takes care of orphans and widows, and those who are in want on account of sickness or any other cause, and those who are in bonds, and the strangers who are sojourners among [us].... We all hold this common gathering on Sunday, since it is the first day, on which God transforming darkness and matter made the universe, and Jesus Christ our Saviour rose from the dead on the same day. For they crucified him on the day before Saturday, and on the day after Saturday,

he appeared to his apostles and disciples and taught them these things which I have passed on to you also for your serious consideration.¹

What do you notice in that depiction? There was a regular meeting of the believers. On what day? Sunday, right? And what was the reason given for meeting on Sundays, the first day of the week? It was two-fold: (1) It was the first day of creation, and (2) it was the first day of the *new* creation – the day Jesus’ mortal body put on immortality. Over time, some Christians designated one Sunday a year as an annual commemoration of the resurrection, eventually coming to be called Easter. We acknowledged that last week. But really, every Sunday is Easter Sunday. Every first day of the week we gather because that’s the day he got up.

What else did you hear in Justin Martyr’s description of what second century Christians did on Sundays? There was a Scripture Reading, right? And then there was a leader who got up and preached a sermon from that text. They prayed and said, “Amen.” They ate together the bread and wine – the Lord’s Table. What else? Ah, yes – they collected an offering. That’s a little peak into a Sunday church service in the middle of the 100s. Interesting, isn’t it?

But again, that’s not Scripture. It’s not binding on us. But 1 Corinthians 16 is! And it is one of the places where the Christians of Justin Martyr’s day got some of these ideas, namely Sunday gatherings and an offering. The passage we’re looking at today may seem like one of those throwaway passages in the Bible, but nothing in the Bible is throwaway. There’s so much here to correct and inform our practices today in the 21st century. In short, what we’re going to see from 1 Corinthians 16:1-4 is just this: **the Christian life is supposed to be consistent.**

I think we often prize being idiosyncratic – I don’t want to conform; I prefer to have my own personal flare. We’re attracted to the eccentric. And we easily gravitate toward being erratic. We’re often marked by irregularity instead of predictability. But today’s text paints a different picture for us. **The Christian life is supposed to be consistent**, steady, stable, regular, disciplined, dependable. Chapter 15 ended with a stirring exhortation to “be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord.” Today’s text, the very next text, makes that a little more tangible. It means an ordinary, ordered, organized, regimented, regulated routine. **The Christian life is supposed to be consistent.**

Let’s pray and look more closely at the passage...

Consistent with Apostolic Teaching

We’re coming to the end of this letter. Throughout the letter it’s been obvious that Paul is responding to issues that either he’s heard that the Corinthian church is having or direct questions that they have asked him. A repeated refrain in the last half of the letter, signaling that Paul is moving on to address a new topic, is the phrase – “now concerning...” “Now concerning the matters about which you wrote...” (7:1). “Now concerning the betrothed...” (7:25). “Now concerning food offered to idols...” (8:1). “Now concerning spiritual gifts...” (12:1). This statement starts a new section. And we see it today as we segue from that magnificent treatment of the resurrection to something

new. “Now concerning the collection for the saints...” (v. 1). They evidently had heard about a giving campaign and they had questions.

We’re going to get into the details of the offering, but the first thing I want you to notice from this is that **the Christian life is supposed to be consistent** with apostolic teaching. The Christian life is submitted to God, who ultimately revealed himself in Jesus Christ, who appointed Apostles as an extension of his authority to establish the Church. And so the Christian life is not self-directed. It’s not about listening to your heart. If it were, there would be a billion different Christianities. But no, **the Christian life is supposed to be consistent** with, in conformity to an authority outside of ourselves. The Corinthians asked Paul about matters. And Paul wrote to them and told them what to do or think on particular topics. We don’t have Paul or Peter with us today. But we have their writings. And we must seek to make our life and doctrine match up, be consistent with the apostolic teaching found there.

Paul said, “Now concerning the collection for the saints: as I directed the churches of Galatia, so you also are to do.” He’s directing them. He’s telling them what to do. Earlier in 14:37-38 he asserted “that the things I am writing to you are a command of the Lord. If anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized.” What we are dealing with in this book is not just a historical record of what some people believed about God in the first century. It’s not an historically interesting artifact, like Justin Martyr’s *First Apology* in the second century. It is divinely inspired, authoritative teaching. There’s a Latin phrase – *norma normans*. It means, “the norm that norms.” Scripture is the highest norm and so we must be normed by it. We must bend to its shape, not try to bend it to ours.

Are there any ways that you think your thinking might be inconsistent with the Bible’s? We all have them. It’s a process in this life of constantly seeking to be brought into consistency with what God has revealed. But is that what you want? Are you willing to be shown and to change where you’re inconsistent, out of step with Scripture? Preaching word-by-word, verse-by-verse, section-by-section throughout Scripture is one great way to keep bringing ourselves into greater **consistency** with the norming norm. And that’s what we do here, paying careful attention to and bowing the knee to God as he’s revealed himself in the Bible. **Consistent** with apostolic teaching. Do you see that there in v. 1?

Consistent with Other Churches

Paul wrote to the Corinthian church – “Now concerning the collection for the saints: *as I directed the churches of Galatia*, so you also are to do.” That phrase in the middle there – “as I directed the churches of Galatia” – shows us another way that **the Christian life is supposed to be consistent**. The things our church does are supposed to be consistent with the faith and practice of other churches. Yes, the culture in Corinth was unique in some ways and would be reflected in the vibe of the church in Corinth and make it feel a little different than the churches in Galatia or the church in Jerusalem that spoke a different language even. But what unites them overshadows those minor differences and there should be a lot of commonalities across place and time. This gets at a lowercase ‘c’ kind of catholicity.

Paul has demonstrated a concern for this throughout the letter. He started off this letter with a nod to it – “To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in

Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours” (1:2). In 4:17 he said, “That is why I sent you Timothy, my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, to remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach them everywhere in every church.” In 7:17 he said, “This is my rule in all the churches.” In 14:33 he said, “As in all the churches of the saints...” [see also 11:16]. Here Paul says, “as I directed the churches of Galatia, so you also are to do.”

A church isn't supposed to try to be new or distinct or different – Church 2.0, 3.0, 4.0... They're all supposed to look basically the same; do the same basic stuff. If they're all submitted to the apostles' teaching then they should all have the same basic doctrine and structure. You don't have to reinvent the wheel or come up with a creative new way of doing things or keep re-making yourself. Just be consistent with the basic stuff that all churches have been doing throughout the ages.

Ah, you say, so is this an argument for becoming capital 'C' Catholic/Roman Catholic? Or maybe even Eastern Orthodox? This is a trend among some. But no, because (A) those churches are not subscribing to Scripture as the only norming norm but have added their church traditions as an authority equal to Scripture, and (B) because even though they may achieve a certain level of consistency throughout their churches, it involves extrabiblical practices like bowing to icons, holy water, incense, rosaries, relics, sacred oils, and elaborate liturgies. What I'm talking about here is what's called The Regulative Principle – that we should only do what Scripture tells us to do in our worship services. This principle is refreshingly simple. It allows for cultural flexibility, but also creates a wide unity because you should be able to go to any church and expect the same basic elements like hearing the Word, singing the Word, praying the Word, preaching the Word, seeing the Word in the two sacraments: baptism and the Lord's Table. So *Sola Scriptura* – Scripture alone as the final authority – creates a **consistency** among multiple churches. Your church shouldn't be doing weird things, but basic things that Paul expected would be happening in all the churches.²

Consistent in Sunday Attendance

The third way we see that **the Christian life is supposed to be consistent** is that we should be **consistent** in Sunday attendance. Look at v. 2 – “On the first day of every week...” What day is the first day of the week? Sunday. Look at the Month view in your Google Calendar. What's the first column on the left? Sundays. It's not the last day of the weekend. It's the first day of the week.

And from the very beginning Christians began assembling on that day as the fulfillment of the OT Sabbath. Leon Morris writes – “As distinct from the Jewish sabbath the first day was a weekly commemoration of the resurrection of the Lord, which indicates something of the importance the Christians attached to that event.”³ The First Day was the day that Jesus rose from the dead. And it changed *everything*. For example, we no longer work in order to rest (6 days of labor leading to one day of leisure). We begin our week by resting, resting in the finished work of Christ for us, and *then* we move out from there to do good works *from* our salvation, not *for* it. From that first Sunday in the Upper Room when the resurrected Christ appeared to a gathering of his confused disciples (Jn. 20:19) to the Sunday after that (Jn. 20:26) and every Sunday since Christians have been gathering to celebrate the resurrection of our Lord and worship him.

In Acts 20 you see Paul staying in Troas a whole week. Why? So that he could be sure to catch one of the Sunday services of the church there. Luke writes – “On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul talked with them” (Acts 20:7). Paul was the guest preacher that Sunday. There was preaching, there was fellowship, there was communion... on the first day of the week, Sunday.

Here in 1 Corinthians 16 Paul assumes that the church in Corinth would be gathering on the first day of the week. Actually, it says, “On the first day of *every* week.” If you’re a Christian, your goal should be to gather with your church *every* Sunday. This may mean less travel or picking more expensive flights. If you are out of town, you do your research ahead of time and gather with another church that does the same things we do here on Sunday.

There are exceptions – if you’re throwing up, it would not be wise to come. If you’re in a hospital hooked up to an IV, you can’t come. If you’re working in a hospital changing a patient’s IV, you can’t come. But you’re still missing out. It’s not normal. For others who are healthy and don’t work a necessary job that requires some Sundays, your Sunday attendance should be **consistent**, not intermittent. This is the basic rhythm of the Christian life.

Most Sundays won’t make a giant splash. But **consistent**, regular, reorienting of your life to this weekly rhythm where you are going through this experience together with brothers and sisters you’re in covenant with... it changes you... over time. It’s a crucial, I would argue the most fundamental, discipline of the Christian life and way you express your faith and feed your faith.

“On the first day of every week” you should be here setting apart this time and the Lord as first in your life. Assembling with the saints is so grounding, it evens you out, it keeps you from being so flighty, so irregular, so all over the place. How are you doing with being **consistent** with Sunday attendance? Are you a little spotty? Did you catch all seven sermons we did in 1 Corinthians 15? If not, what can you do to grow in that habit of Sunday attendance? I know one pastor who regularly says, “Sunday morning is a Saturday night decision.” Maybe there are priority issues that your Sunday attendance is surfacing in your heart. Do some soul searching. Don’t make Sunday a legalistic box to check to feel righteous. Make it a life-line to Jesus who is your righteousness that you don’t want to miss.

Consistent in Giving

Are you seeing the consistent theme of consistency? Consistent with apostolic teaching. Consistent with other churches. Consistent in Sunday attendance. Next, we notice that **the Christian life is supposed to be consistent** in giving. This is really the main item Paul is talking about here – “Now concerning the collection for the saints.”

It’s a monetary collection. And the saints are the Christians in Jerusalem. We see from several of Paul’s letters that taking up this collection for the church in Jerusalem was a major part of his third missionary journey. The mother church in Jerusalem was enduring hard times. First, they were undergoing religious persecution by the Jewish establishment there. Second, on top of that there was a famine in region of Jerusalem (see Acts 11:28-30). These two factors combined to make an impoverished church. And Paul spearheaded an effort to get the churches in other parts of the world to give to the aid of the church in Jerusalem. Such an act was a powerful way to display the unity of

Jew and Gentile in Christ, the spiritual debt the Gentiles owed to the Jews, the genuineness of the Gentiles' faith, and a testimony to world of the power of the gospel, to the glory to God.

But this kind of generosity came a little quicker for some churches than others. The Corinthians, as we might have come to expect, struggled with it. And so in 2 Corinthians 8-9 Paul has to return to the topic and write some more about it to them. But Romans 15:25-32 shows us that they ultimately came through and contributed.

But what we need to pay attention to most here is the method of collecting this financial offering that Paul prescribes. It involves a regular, weekly offering every Sunday. He says 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.” Notice it says, “each of you.” Every member of the church was expected to give something. Nobody was exempt, no matter how poor. But also notice that it doesn't prescribe a percentage or a precise amount, like a tax. It just says, “put something aside.” This is a free-will offering (e.g. Lev. 23:15-21).

But it's not a free-for-all, free in the sense of whenever and whatever you feel like. It was supposed to be methodical. As one person has said, “Weekly giving... builds in systematic, self-disciplined, consistent generosity.”⁴ And think about it: to give regularly like this, you must work regularly. The Christian life is about getting up and going to work 6 days out of 7, working hard, making money. And then when you get a paycheck (whether that's daily, weekly, or monthly) you take something off the top of that and give it to the church. That takes intentionality.

The church, for its part, is expected to have a treasury in which to “store up” these gifts. Today we call it a bank account. This requires a level of order and organization on the part of the church, making deposits, keeping records, balancing books.

The phrase, “as he may prosper,” indicates that the individual donations should be in keeping with one's income, which is freeing in some sense, but it also means that you need to have some idea of your income and your expenses, some kind of budget, some kind of accounting, some kind of planning.

Paul urges this kind of deliberate, regular collection “so that there will be no collecting when I come.” He doesn't want the offering to be an after-thought, but something that was steadily saved up. As one commentary puts it, “Paul's emphasis falls on the value of advanced planning and preparation rather than last-minute scrambling and the resultant pressure.”⁵ A healthy church shouldn't have to be making periodic appeals for giving, but everybody should just be giving regularly. What Paul is calling for here is something that is systematic, organized, and proportional.⁶ In other words, he's referring to **consistent** giving.

This is, by the way, where we get the idea of having a time in our Sunday services where we pass around an offering basket in addition to singing, praying, preaching, and eating and drinking at the Lord's Table. We pool together these regular offerings and use them to pay for a place to gather and to support those who serve the church in a dedicated manner (as Paul talked about in ch. 9). But we also give a lot the offering away to those inside and outside the body who have financial need, and to missions and ministries. At our last members meeting we voted to give \$10,000 to a sister church that does not have as much, like the Jerusalem church here. And every year for as long as I've been here,

we've given money to the man who planted the church that planted our church, continuing to give to his widow after he died as a way to honor our spiritual lineage.

From the fact that collecting an offering is a prescribed part of the Sunday gathering, Craig Blomberg concludes that “stewardship is as much a part of obedience and devotion to God as prayer, praise, fellowship, instruction, and the like.”⁷ It demonstrates trust. It trains your heart to not treasure things. How are you doing at this? Are you a **consistent** giver? Or do you give irregularly, sporadically, whenever you remember, from whatever is leftover? Are your finances a bit haphazard? Have you filed your taxes already? Don't you want to be disciplined and careful with money and therefore able to give a determined amount every time you get paid because you have a budget and you know what you can afford and you want to support the work of the gospel? Automatic bill pay and online giving can be done deliberately, but I'm old-school and I think there's still something meaningful about making your offering as part of the assembled worship service. If you don't put a check in the offering basket, at least as it's passed by every week it can be a reminder to you of why you're giving and a chance to reflect on your finances and what they reveal about your heart. **The Christian life is supposed to be consistent** in giving.

Consistent in Character

And then lastly we see that **the Christian life is supposed to be consistent** in character. Look at v. 3 – “And when I arrive, I will send those whom you accredit by letter to carry your gift to Jerusalem.” This is one of those verses that recognizes the administrative aspect of church. There's an inescapable institutionalism to church – lists and letters and such. They had to have a process for determining who they were going to accredit. They had some kind of membership meetings with decision-making. There were policies and procedures. But the main thing to notice here is the level of accountability and the integrity, the character that was expected.

As one person points out – “Notice Paul's scrupulous care in the handling of this money. He was arranging the collection, but he did not plan to touch the money in person at any time. The Corinthians would raise it, keep it till Paul came, and send it by messengers of their own choosing to its destination.”⁸ Paul had **consistent** character. He wasn't a charlatan, pretending to be all altruistic, but really just fleecing congregations and absconding with their money. No! He genuinely cared about the glory of God and had protocols in place to make sure that his dealings were above board. He was not greedy or deceptive or using authority for selfish gain.

And Paul expected there to be noble, stand-up, dependable, trustworthy people of character in the church at Corinth – people who could be trusted to take a large sum of money a long distance and not embezzle it, but use it for what it was intended; people whose public persona was **consistent** with their private behavior.

Is that you? Are you a man or woman of character? Could we count on you to handle the money with honesty? Can you be trusted with responsibility? With freedom? There may be weeks that go by in the church where we just see each other on Sundays. Can we count on you that when we're apart you're acting **consistently** with your commitments? Is your life full of contradictions? What are you doing to address that? How are you pursuing disciplines and accountability that helps you avoid hypocrisy? Nip sin in the bud, before you end up in the news or under church discipline. Be

purposefully growing in godliness so that nobody would bat an eye at appointing you to be the Deacon of Finance or to work with youth or to have keys to the building or anything like that.

Verse 4 is curious. “If it seems advisable that I should go also, they will accompany me.” Paul is indicating that he may go himself with the delegation to deliver the gift to the church in Jerusalem, but he doesn’t know. It turns out that Paul did end up being part of the party that brought the money to Jerusalem (Acts 24:17). But what we can learn from this is that Paul doesn’t know the future. There is a humility here that is willing to submit to other people and circumstances – “If it seems advisable...” – and ultimately to God – *Lord-willing* (see James 4:13-16). This is a key component of character – a way of thinking and talking that is **consistent** with belief in a sovereign God who is ultimately in control.

Conclusion

So in these four verses that may have seemed like throwaway verses that we could just skip over (*How could you preach a whole sermon on this?*), we’ve seen that there’s actually a lot here for our edification. We see that there’s a theme here of **consistency**. **The Christian life is supposed to be consistent** with apostolic teaching, with other churches, in Sunday attendance, in giving, and in character. Christians should be people who aren’t just making it up as they go, catering church to their own whims, marching to the beat of their own drummer, coming on Sundays when they feel like it, spending money on themselves recklessly and giving unpredictably, whose walk doesn’t match up with their talk. Your life shouldn’t be a mess, but disciplined. Your heart shouldn’t be conflicted and tossed about so easily, but trained. The Apostle Paul wants us to be **consistent**, steady, calm, controlled, like clock-work, reliable, faithful.

Now how do we do that? That’s really hard, isn’t it? My life does not perfectly match that description. I still have inconsistencies and I know you do to. Some personalities and backgrounds find something like what Paul is describing here naturally easier than others. If you had a stable childhood home and are middle-class you could look more like this even if you aren’t a Christian. So what does Paul really have in mind here? He’s not just lauding virtue and self-discipline like some life coach might. He’s not just talking about a personality trait. He’s talking to people who are connected with the Person of Christ.

Where do I see that in this text? Did you notice that title “saints” in v. 1? This is how Paul referred to the Christians in the Jerusalem church – “saints,” holy ones. We usually think of saints as elite, perfect people who attained some superhuman status. But this is how Paul refers to anyone who is in Christ. It’s how he referred to the Corinthians themselves at the beginning of this letter – “To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.” And the Corinthians, as we’ve seen in this letter, were far from perfect. You get the status of saint by your faith union with Jesus Christ, not by your merit. You’re joined to Jesus and all his status and righteousness is credited to you immediately and irrevocably. And then out of this union you begin to slowly be conformed more and more to his image.

So if you want to be more **consistent**, cultivate your connection to Jesus by faith. Focus on him. “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever” (Heb. 13:8).

He never fluctuates or changes. He never has a bad day. He is the one who sustains the world and the regular rising of the sun each day, who “upholds the universe by the word of his power” (Heb. 1:3). He never gave into temptation. Jesus lived in perfect submission to the Father. He did not come to abolish the Law, but to fulfill it. Jesus kept the weekly Sabbath. Luke 4:16 says, “And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. And *as was his custom*, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day.” It was his custom. He was **consistent**. Jesus Christ is dependable. He was sent on an errand, a mission to save sinners and he completed it without wavering. He is the kind of guy you can trust implicitly, no suspicion of corruption or duplicity. He was generous and sacrificial in his giving, giving his very life. Jesus is the epitome of **consistency**. And he did that, he is that, for you! His steadfast love is set on you! Live in that love. Heighten your experience of being connected to Christ, and you will also grow in being **consistent**. His steady, unchanging love for you will ground you, anchor you...

The Lord’s Table

The Lord’s Table is a regular part of our weekly Sunday gatherings. It is where we are constantly reminded of our union with Christ...

This sermon was addressed originally to the people at Immanuel Baptist Church, Chicago, Illinois, by Pastor Nathan Carter on Sunday morning, April 12, 2026. It is not meant to be a polished essay, but was written to be delivered orally. The mission of Immanuel is to be a multiplying community that enjoys and proclaims the Good News of Christ in the great city of Chicago.

End Notes:

¹ *The First Apology of Justin, the Martyr*, 67. Accessed at www.ccel.org/ccel/richardson/fathers.x.ii.iii.html

² See www.9marks.org/article/dont-do-weird-stuff/

³ Leon Morris, *The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975 [1958]), 238.

⁴ Craig Blomberg, *1 Corinthians*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 326.

⁵ Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 843.

⁶ Thomas R. Schreiner, *1 Corinthians*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2018), 329.

⁷ Blomberg, 326.

⁸ Morris, 239.