

BRIGHT HOPE FOR TOMORROW: The Corinthian Challenge – True Excellence

May 1, 2022

Overarching Theme: 2022 – *The Year of the Lord’s Favor* (Luke 4:19)

Instructions:

When using this material as teacher, feel free to pick and choose the point you want to emphasize in the lesson. *The format of the curriculum is designed to have an abundance of information in which to refer as desired.*

Core Point:

As the world begins awakening from 2 years of pandemic stupor, the words of Jesus proclaiming “the year of the Lord’s favor” is a message whose time has come. This passage from Luke 4 harkens back to the ‘year of jubilee’ of Leviticus 25 and Isaiah 61, a year of a fresh start, a clean slate and reset for everyone who can envision new *possibilities* with God this Easter season and always.

Reflect on this Scripture: 1 Corinthians 16:1-4 NIV *Now about the collection for the Lord’s people: Do what I told the Galatian churches to do. ² On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with your income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made. ³ Then, when I arrive, I will give letters of introduction to the men you approve and send them with your gift to Jerusalem. ⁴ If it seems advisable for me to go also, they will accompany me.*

2 Corinthians 8:6-7 NIV ⁶ *So we urged Titus, just as he had earlier made a beginning, to bring also to completion this act of grace on your part. ⁷ But since you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in the love we have kindled in you^[a]—see that you also excel in this grace of giving.*

This Week: 1 Corinthians 16:1-4; 2 Corinthians 8:6-7

The Corinthians have written Paul about the collection. The term “collection” suggesting a gathering of funds for a special purpose, appears only here (16:1-4) in the Pauline corpus, but refers to the onetime offering to which he committed himself in Jerusalem (Gal 2:1-10, esp. 2:10). At the Jerusalem conference (Acts 15) he promised that he would pull together from his largely gentile churches a goodwill

offering as a demonstration, as an affirmation of Christian unity to what he otherwise calls the "saints" or the "poor among the saints in Jerusalem" (Rom 15:26). We know from 2 Corinthians that the Corinthians initially responded readily to the opportunity to take part in this collection, but that their earlier zeal was lost with the passage of time (8:11). When 1 Corinthians was written, the Corinthian believers were willing participants in this generous undertaking, and Paul's response suggests that their concerns were on the logistics of how to gather it and what its disposition might be. Unlike 2 Corinthians, one finds in 1 Corinthians no hint of contention, confusion, or diminution of zeal about participation in the collection. But something happens between 1st Corinthians and 2nd Corinthians. Hence we have Paul's enthusiastic admonition toward generosity in 2nd Corinthians 8 & 9.

Paul's appeal in Chapter 8:6-7 lay out the issue that he will pursue in the rest of this chapter and in the next – namely, why and how the Corinthians can take part in the collection – and capitalizes on his understanding of the hallmark of the Corinthians: They are dedicated to, passionately committed to, "excelling." Their zeal for "excelling" has not always been considered a positive attribute by Paul; in fact, much of 1 Corinthians is devoted to countering their tendency to use nearly every occasion to see if they can one-up each other (e.g., who is wise, who has the freedom to eat what, who has which spiritual gift). Whether positive or not, "excelling" is a characteristic of the Corinthians as Paul understands them, and in 8:7 he attempts to turn it to positive ends: "Just as you excel in all things [with a positively stated list of examples following], so we want you to excel in this grace [the collection, understood]."

– Adapted from the *New Interpreter's Bible Commentary, Vol X, 995-996; Vol XI p. 121*

Questions to Ponder for Accountability in the Group:

1. The Corinthians had a tendency to take too much credit for achievements that they had little to do with. Have you ever had a coworker who exhibited this tendency? Have you ever been tempted in this way?
2. How have we, like the so-called 'self made' Corinthians, under appreciated the many gifts of grace in our lives? What are some ways that we can grow in greater appreciation for God's simple and not so simple gifts each day?
3. As recipients of such lavish grace in Jesus Christ, what are some practical ways that we can 'pay it forward' and "excel in this grace of giving?" (2 Cor 8:7b)
4. What are some of your dreams for our community of faith as we transform \$2.8 million of debt service into dream service? What are some of the greatest opportunities for us to be a "Bright Hope" church in the season before us?

Activity for the Life of a Disciple:

1. Remember to find encouragement for the day by reading the daily devotional from FUMCC
2. Pray for how God's will can be done through us in the Bright Hope for Tomorrow campaign.
3. Ponder and pray on this scripture this week: 2 Corinthians 8:7 ⁷ *But since you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in the love we have kindled in you^[a]—see that you also excel in this grace of giving.*