Do Everything in Love

1 Corinthians 16:1-24

Key Verse: 16:14 “Do everything in love.”

Good morning! This is my first sermon after coming back from a family trip to Korea. May God grant me the spirit of words and the heart of God while writing this message. Today’s passage is the last chapter of Paul’s first letter to the believers in the Corinth Church. When we review the previous chapters, Paul urged them to be united in Christ as parts of one body, overcoming conflicts among them such as the issue of division, lawsuits, sexual immorality, food sacrificed to idols, spiritual gifts and so on. In the last chapter, Paul concludes all his teachings with one sentence, which is ‘*do everything in love*.” He also finishes his letter with a personal request and benediction. Let’s study what Paul’s last message means for the believers in the church and to us today.

First, God loves a cheerful giver. (1-4) Look at verses 1-4. “***Now about the collection for the Lord’s people: Do what I told the Galatian churches to do. 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. Then, when I arrive, I will give letters of introduction to the men you approve and sent them with your gift to Jerusalem. If it seems advisable for me to go also, they will accompany me***.” While Paul was writing this letter, he was in Ephesus. His plan was to visit Corinth via Macedonia. Paul asked the believers in the Corinth Church to prepare a contribution to the churches in Jerusalem. According to Acts 11:28 the believers in the Jerusalem Church suffered from severe famine and poverty. Paul wanted to encourage them with financial support from the gentile believers. He said that the gentile believers had a certain duty to share material blessings as well as spiritual blessings with the Jewish believers in Jerusalem. Paul wanted to bring that contribution to the Jerusalem Church when he returned to Jerusalem after his missionary journey. Indeed, he did later.

Before he visited Corinth, Paul asked the Corinthian Christians to prepare the relief offering in advance with a willing and joyful spirit, not with a reluctant or grumpy spirit. He asked them to set aside a sum of money in proportion to their income on the first day of every week. Why on the first day of every week? This indicates that Paul wanted them to offer it as their priority. God loves the first fruit from our harvest and blesses those who bring the first and best to him. God values our hearts more than our fruit. God looks at our attitude more than the amount of offering. Paul urged the believers to support the suffering brothers and sisters with the heart of God and with the love of Christ. His heartful message continues in his second letter.

Let’s look at 2 Corinthians 9:6-8. “***Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly; and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work***.” Amen! It is not easy for us to mention offerings or tithes in sermons or messages. It was not easy for Paul to ask for the relief offering from the Corinthians, too. This is because people are sensitive to the issue of money. Some people among the believers are tempted and tested with offerings in the church. This is not surprising because even Judas Iscariot, one of the twelve disciples of Jesus, was also tempted by money and failed to Satan. Later, Paul warned against the love of money saying that the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. (1 Ti 6:10) This is the reason why Jesus said that we cannot serve both God and Money. (Mt 6:24) Some people serve Money more than God thinking that money can provide their security.

Whether they are sensitive to money or not, Paul urged them to prepare the relief offering by faith. He did not want anyone who would collect the money hurriedly or reluctantly, but willingly and with a joyful spirit. God loves a cheerful giver. The relief offering which they collect for suffering brothers is not only for them, but also for God. Jesus said that whatever we do for the least of these people in his name, we do it for Jesus. When they offered to the poor brothers, they did so for Jesus because they were Jesus’ people. For the coming ISBC, some gave special offerings for the brothers and sisters who need financial support. Whatever you did, you did not only for the needy people, but also for Jesus because they are Jesus’ people. Your good deeds will never be in vain, but will be recorded and rewarded in heaven. Remember this. Our God loves a cheerful giver. Our God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. Amen.

When I started going to church in Korea, I learned from my Christian friend how to set aside a tithe each month. So, right after I got my salary in cash, I set aside a tenth of my income and put it in an envelope for tithing. I did this every month before I went to the army. Some of our church members do the same twice a month regularly. This is important because we believe that all things come from God. We believe a tithe belongs to God who provided a job and the necessary health for us to work. Setting aside a sum of money for offering is a wisdom of God. We easily forget what belongs to God because we are busy. We sometimes become reluctant when we need money. It may not be difficult to offer $10 out of $100 as a tithing. But it may be not easy to offer $ 1,000 out $ 10,000 because $ 1,000 is a lot of money. When we set aside a sum of money regularly on the first day of each week or each month, we avoid these conflicts.

Look at verse 3 again. Paul said that he would send the relief offering with a letter of introduction to the Jerusalem church through the people who were approved by the Corinth Church. He also showed his will to accompany them for sure. Paul did so to get rid of all unnecessary doubt and conflicts because of the offering. This is the reason why all offerings in the church should be entrusted to reliable and trustworthy treasurers who handle the money of God with honesty and transparency.

Second, do everything in love. (5-17) From verses 5-9 Paul told them his travel plan, and from verses 10-17 he shared his personal request concerning his two fellow workers. According to Acts 18, the Corinthian Church started with Paul. Paul met Aquila and Priscilla in Corinth. Paul had great affection for Corinth, so he wanted to visit there and encourage the brothers and sisters. He did not want a passing visit by exchanging superficial greetings, but by spending some time with them. (6,7) Paul wanted to share spiritual blessings with them. Still, Paul did not live according to his plan, but followed the Holy Spirit. At that time there was the great work of the Holy Spirit in Ephesus. He knew the necessity of staying in Ephesus for effective work. In verse 9 he says that he would stay at Ephesus longer because a great door for effective work opened to him. Indeed, in Ephesus, especially in the lecture hall of Tyrannus, he taught the gospel for two years and raised many disciples who came from the province of Asia. (Ac 19:8-10) Here we learn Paul’s obedience to the Holy Spirit in doing the work of God. Paul had his own idea and plan, but he denied himself and followed the Holy Spirit. This is the reason why Jesus worked with him and blessed his ministry.

In verses 10-17 Paul urged the Corinthians to welcome Timothy and Apollos who might visit them. Paul asked them to treat Timothy not with contempt, but with respect and love. Timothy was a young servant. Paul called him his true son in Christ. In his first letter to Timothy, Paul admonished Timothy to let no one look down on him because he is young. (1 Ti 4:12). Timothy was also timid. So, Paul wrote him in his second letter that God did not give him a spirit of timidity, but the spirit of love, power, and self-discipline. (2 Ti 1:7) Paul loved Timothy as his own son. Paul wanted to protect Timothy from Satan’s attack. So, Paul urged the Corinthians to welcome Timothy with respect and send him back in peace.

Next, Paul urged them to welcome Apollos, too. Apollos was not willing to visit Corinth for some reasons. He likely did not want to be involved in church division. Some followed him as a leader along with Paul and Cephas. He probably did not want to fight against all kinds of problems in the church. But he changed his mind. He would visit Corinth when he had the opportunity. Apollos also denied himself to follow the will of God. Now look at verses 13-14. “***Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be courageous; be strong. Do everything in love***.” Suddenly, Paul gave such a strong message to the Corinthians, just as General Joshua gave to the Israelites before they entered the Promised Land. Joshua and the Israelites were about to fight against their enemies to conquer the Promised Land. Paul encouraged the Corinthians to fight a good fight as Christians soldiers. They had to be on their guard. They had to stand firm in the gospel faith. They had to be strong and courageous. But all things must be done in love. All things must be done with the love of God. In chapter 13 Paul mentioned about the importance of love. Even though we speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, we only become a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If we have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, we are nothing. If we give all we possess to the poor and give over our bodies to hardship, but do not have love, we gain nothing. (1 Co 13:1-3) What Paul mentions here is that we must do everything in love and with love. No matter how great and beautiful the things we plan and do are, if we do them without love, we gain nothing and we are nothing. Paul asked the Corinthians to prepare the relief offering with the same attitude, with the love of Christ. Paul asks us to offer and to work whatever in the name of Jesus, with love. With what kind of love, must we do? We must do everything as God loves us. We love others as God loves us. We offer ourselves as a living sacrifice as God offered Christ on the cross.

The words ‘*Do everything in love*.” really challenges us in loving others and doing the work of God. Do we worship God with the love of God? Do we offer as God offers his Son? Do we serve others as Christ serves us? Paul asked the Corinthians to collect the relief money with the same love as God offered his Son. Paul asked them to welcome Timothy and Apollos as Christ welcomed them. Paul asks us to do the work of God as Christ did the work of God. Someone who said that he returned from heaven confessed that the only thing Christ Jesus asked him was nothing but how much he loved God and loved others while living on this earth. Only things we did with the love of God will be credited in heaven. Remember what God has done for you and your life through Jesus Christ. God is love. For God so loved the world that he gave his One and Only Son that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life. (Jn 3:16) He loved us until he sacrificed his One and Only Son for our sins. Let us love one another as Christ loved us. This year is the 50th anniversary of Rev. Billy Graham starting his crusade in Korea. 50 years ago, Billy Graham preached his first message to millions of Koreans with the title, “Love one another.” He asked them to accept the love of God who gave his one and only Son Jesus on the cross. He quoted John 15:13 which says, “*Greater love has no one than this; to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.*” 50 years later he spoke this, now his son Franklin Graham is going to deliver the same message to Koreans today. As we studied, love never fails. Love never disappoints us. Love continues to work from generation to generation. Let us do everything in love and with love. Amen!

In verses 15-18 Paul urged the Corinthians to welcome other co-workers such as Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus, who devoted themselves to the work of the Lord. Paul did not miss even one person who worked with him and for the gospel. His shepherd heart and mindfulness came from the love of Christ.

In conclusion Paul finishes his long letter with final greetings and benediction. He shared the warm greetings of Aquila and Priscilla and all house churches in Ephesus with the Corinthians. He blessed the Corinthians with a holy kiss. He prayed to God to send Jesus soon. (Maranatha!) He shared his unceasing affection with the words, “***My love to all of you in Christ Jesus***. Amen.” Paul spent 16 long chapters to advise the Corinthian believers. His conclusion was simple, “*Do everything in love*.” Help us to love God with all our hearts, soul and strength and love others as Christ loved us. Amen!