

ORIGINS

IN 1 CORINTHIANS 16, WE SEE A WITNESS FOR WHAT THE CHURCH IS IN THE MIND OF GOD, HOW IT'S SUPPOSED TO FUNCTION AND LOOK IN ITS RELATIONSHIP TO EACH OTHER AS BROTHERS AND SISTERS; AS CHURCHES ACROSS REGIONS; AND TO THE LORD. I BELIEVE 1 CORINTHIANS 16 PROVIDES A ROADMAP FOR US IN UNDERSTANDING HOW WE GET FROM WHERE WE ARE TO WHERE THE LORD WANTS US TO BE AT THE END CLOTHED IN SPLENDOR.

I. THE CENTER OF GRAVITY IN THE EARLY CHURCH (1 CORINTHIANS 16:1-4)

The church that doesn't have a proper center of gravity will fall over under pressure, duress, or strength of opposition that pushes it one way or another. In the same way that a boxer distributes weight to his body to make all of the members of his body work properly, the body of Christ needs to rightly distribute weight and gravity to face the blows that are going to come.

- A. Paul is addressing a recently, formerly unreached people group. People who didn't have or know the gospel; they weren't a church but now they are. And he wants them to give sacrificially to the saints in Jerusalem.
 - 1) was is because they were poorer or hurting? I believe Paul was doing this because "where your heart is, there your treasure is also." What you give to reveals things about your heart
- B. Paul is connecting this new, mostly Gentile church to the story and giving them insight into the true center of gravity of the true church.
 - 1) Paul believed it was essential that they understood their identity as a people being still connected to the covenant to Israel, to the Jewish people, and to the destiny of Jerusalem
 - 2) the church of Jesus's center of gravity is firmly postured in an understanding of God's ongoing covenantal purposes for Israel, for Jerusalem, and for the Jewish people
- C. One of the reasons Paul is doing this is to eliminate the possibility of Gentiles assuming that God has transferred the identity and destiny and blessings from national Israel to the Gentiles. He's mitigating the growth of anti-Semitic and anti-Judaic tendencies within the Gentile believers that was beginning to rise and mature (Romans 11)
- D. The new covenant is for Israel. And we, the church, have been grafted into the commonwealth of Israel (Ephesians 2:11-13)
 - 1) when the church loses sight of God's ongoing covenantal promises to Israel, the church ceases to be the church and becomes just another institution that bears the name, but does not bear the reality and the substance of it
- E. In the same way that the church grew exponentially in the first generation, so too will the church grow exponentially in the final generation. And it's



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imperative that the church in the final generation not look like Rome in its antagonism towards the branches that were broken off.

- 1) giving prepares us to relate to the Jewish people with generosity, kindness, tenderness, and a confidence in future grace
- F. The church of the last days, in contrast to the church in the first generation, will be required to give more than just money to the saints in Jerusalem. It will be required to stand shoulder to shoulder with them in the coming storm and to be a support for them in a prophetic way
 - 1) we cannot heal the wounds that only the Lord can heal, but we are called to play a pivotal and decisive role in the provocation of Israel to jealousy at the end. This requires a conscious connection with Israel's story as a nation in her historical election, her present rejection, and her future restoration

II. THE NATURE OF THE EARLY CHURCH (1 CORINTHIANS 16:5-20)

We see many different expressions of the church throughout human history, which raises the question as to what the fundamental nature of the church is.

- A. A maranatha church looks like standing watchful and standing firm in faith.
- B. It seems like Paul is just dropping names and locations, but it's significant because it reveals the fundamental nature of the church across the Roman Empire in the first century. It reveals to us this beautiful reality that the church in its fundamental nature is an interconnected family.
 - 1) Paul is affirming the legitimacy of the church in a couple's home in the same way that he's affirming the legitimacy of what we could call the megachurch in Ephesus. He's affirming the validity of the first fruit believers, the new guys on the block. He's empowering the new leaders and saying they're legitimate. He's also affirming the older guys like Apollos, who've been around for a long time, who are seasoned. And he's also pulling cross-generationally
- C. I believe that the true apostolic heart is jealous for the weaving together of relational tapestry across regions. I believe the maranatha church of the last days will be a people who are interconnected locally, regionally, and internationally in a way that gives latitude for both the large and effectual expressions of church.
 - 1) as persecution hits, the Lord is going to make of us a church that's deeply relational. The church at its core, fundamental nature is a relational body of brothers and sisters
- D. The maranatha church is decentralized, distributed in nature and in character.
 - 1) Paul intentionally created leadership vacuums by withdrawing and so that elders would be raised up. The elders were to protect from centralized leadership by sending Apollo and Timothy, etc, and pulling all these people together
 - 2) in the church in the West, we're set up for a big fall because our center of gravity is so centralized. A decentralized leadership structure means that you can't cut off the head; and if you do strike a blow, it's only going to grow and multiply because it's decentralized in its fundamental structure

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III. THE IDENTITY AND WITNESS OF THE EARLY CHURCH (1 CORINTHIANS 16:21-22)

This is where the word “maranatha” is introduced.

- A. The word for “accursed” is “anathema.” Right in the middle of “anathema” and “grace” is “maranatha.” So it reads, “If anyone does not love the Lord, let him be anathema. Maranatha.” Paul is explaining the central hope and identity of the early church by saying this one phrase that’s in context both to anathema, the curse, and the grace that’s bestowed upon the body of Christ: maranatha.
 - 1) if you pronounce it one way, it means, “The Lord has come.” If you pronounce it another way, it means, “The Lord will come.” And if you pronounce it yet another way, it’s an intercessory cry, “Lord, come”
 - 2) with one word, Paul is encapsulating the entirety of the gospel story: that the Lord has come, that the Lord is coming again, and therefore, Lord come
- B. I believe that Paul is using the word “maranatha” as the central rallying point because he has now centered their center of gravity within the story arc of covenant by emphasizing the issue of Israel in verses 1-4.
 - 1) it’s not the issue of Israel that he’s emphasizing; he’s emphasizing the issue of covenant
 - 2) Paul wanted the church to be centered around the story of covenant, which means it’s not about Israel or Jerusalem or the Jewish people; it’s about the God who made the covenant. Covenant reveals the nature and character of God
 - 3) this means giving money to Israel. Because if you give money to the saints in Jerusalem, you’re going to be connected to the issue of covenant. And if that connection is maintained, it will protect you from taking on or being influenced by doctrines of demons that would seek to delegitimize Israel’s role in the ongoing drama of redemptive history

IV. CONCLUSION

God intends for the church to be a church that has their center of gravity in the story of covenant.

- A. Paul wanted the church to be profoundly centered around relationship and decentralization.
 - 1) centered around decentralization is a paradox, but it’s profoundly true and profoundly relevant for this generation. Paul’s saying, we are centralizing the message, we are centralizing the story, but we are decentralizing the leadership. We are decentralizing the structure. We’re not hoarding the center. In fact, we’re erasing the center. There should be no center because Christ is the head, Christ is the center. We are members of his body. We are not the head. We are not the center
- B. These three sections of [1 Corinthians 16](#) are, I believe, fundamental and foundational to the fabric of the church of the first century, the church of the ages, and the church at the end. We will be a people whose center of gravity is aligned with God’s purposes of covenant in time and eternity.



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- 1) God has chosen to reveal Himself in and through covenant. He didn't choose to do it through some other way
- C. Coming into the blessing of God's purposes is inseparably connected to the issue of covenant. There is no blessing for the nations outside of covenant. That is why Paul is so jealous to keep the saints in Corinth connected to the main story.
 - 1) I believe the church in the West right now has lost the plot where the issue of covenant and Israel is concerned because if you don't have a proper view of covenant in Israel you don't know what the kingdom is
 - 2) God's will is a covenantal will that's Israel centric. The kingdom is the kingdom of the Son of David. It's not an ethereal spiritual reality, but a physical, tangible reality
- D. A church that's not decentralized will not be clothed in splendor at Christ's coming. A church that's not decentralized will not be prepared to navigate and weather the pressures in the days ahead.
 - 1) centralized leadership structures must and will give way to decentralized leadership structures that [Ephesians 4](#) models of apostles, prophets, shepherds, teachers, and evangelists functioning together and giving way to one another for the building up of the body into unity and into maturity. The coming persecution will force decentralization. That doesn't happen voluntarily beforehand
- E. By saying "maranatha," Paul's saying, here's the basis of our identity in our unity: we believe that He came once, we believe He is coming again. That's enough.
 - 1) I believe what we need to recover in these days and urgently press in for is a simple form of unity and affirmation of orthodoxy that doesn't require 96 pages of a vision statement
 - 2) the Lord is moving the global church into a place of dynamic unity over the basics and the essentials. I believe they're boiling down to this: do you believe He came once for sin to die on the cross for us? Yes. Do you believe He is coming again for judgment to restore all things and all these glorious things will be fulfilled? Yes. Okay. We're brothers. Maranatha