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Maranatha

We are studying 1 Corinthians 16 and in this chapter Paul is responding to the last two questions the Corinthians asked in their letter to Paul. Believers have questions and I encourage believers to ask questions. Anytime you have a question write it down and put it in the little wooden church in the back of the room and I'll interact with it the next week. The important thing is that we grow in grace and knowledge. The Corinthians' asked questions and you should ask questions. The question in verse 1 dealt with the manner of taking up collections for the Jewish saints in the land of Israel who were living in the wake of a series of famines. The issue in verse 12 concerns Apollos who was the favorite teacher of some in Corinth and who they had requested to come.

In responding to these questions we've been reminded of the doctrine of giving and how we ought to set aside a little each week so that when a need arises we don't have to make a big withdrawal from our bank account. We've also been reminded of the doctrine of planning and how we ought to plan but we ought to also figure God into the plan. We've been reminded of the doctrine of imitation and how important it is to imitate the men who imitate the text of the word of God. And finally we've been reminded of the sin of approbation lust. We should not be seeking everyone's approval of our ministry, we should be seeking that people grow in grace and knowledge.

Today, we come to the conclusion of 1 Corinthians in verses 13-24 and Paul concludes with several commands. This is a common conclusion to Paul's letters; he always concludes with a few commands. To introduce them we want to say a few words about commands we find in the Scripture. First, all commands that are written to the Church imply a responsibility to obey. If we don't obey these then there is a price to pay spiritually because

disobedience knocks us out of fellowship. At the same time some commands in Scripture are not written to the Church but to the nation Israel. For example, the Ten Commandments were written to the nation Israel not the Church. The Church is not responsible to follow any of the Ten Commandments. "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness for everyone who believes" (Rom 10:4). "before faith came, we were kept in custody under the law, being shut up to the faith which was later to be revealed. Therefore the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor."

Therefore no Church age believer is under any of the Ten Commandments.

Last Sunday when you left just about everybody here had a little card stuck on their car that said "The Mark of the Beast is the enforcement of SUNDAY Worship!" These were placed on your car by a sect of Seventh Day Adventist's. And what they're trying to say is you have to obey the commandment of the Sabbath in Exodus 20. The problem is that even Paul says, "One person regards one day above another, another regards every day alike. Each person must be fully convinced in his own mind" (Rom 14:5).

Worship is not prescribed for the Church any one day of the week. We can meet on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, et al. any day of the week. There is no day we are commanded to worship on. What we are commanded to do is worship the Lord in all that we say, do and think. So it's just nonsense what they wrote on that card, total nonsense and they are the ones erecting false commandments and putting people under a system of legalism that empowers the flesh and defeat in the Christian life. So just blow it off.

For those of you wondering how in the world they ever concluded that SUNDAY worship was the Mark of the Beast in Revelation, it's because they are historicists. They hold that Rev 4-19 is being fulfilled gradually down through Church History. Historicism means that they try to link things that happened in Church History with the things described in Rev 4-19 in an allegorical way. It's all nonsense. They're stuck in a system of historicism that won't allow them to read the text plainly so they come up with these crazy ideas. But the bottom line is there are commandments written to the Church and we have a responsibility to obey them and that does not include all the commandments in Scripture. Second, some commands written to the Church are to be followed in principle only and not according to the letter. For example, in verse 20 Paul commands, "Greet one another with a holy kiss." And yet I know of very few Christians in this country who follow this command to the letter. They follow it in principle by greeting one another but

not to the letter and I don't think anyone here wants to start following it to the letter. That was a culturally accepted and understood gesture of friendship in their culture which could be misconstrued in our culture as homosexual love. So we take the principle of the command, yes, but not the letter. However, in a culture where people commonly greet one another with a holy kiss they would be right in following this command to the letter. But the important thing, when culture differs, is to follow the spirit of the command. Another example would be women commanded to wear a head covering in 1 Cor 11. Some Christians take it to the letter and according to the letter the passage does teach that a woman is to wear a head covering. But the head covering was a culturally accepted and understood symbol that stood for submission to one's husband in Paul's time and place. In our time and place it is not an accepted and understood as a symbol of submission. So we take the principle of submission, yes, but not to the letter. And if a woman is quiet and respectful of her husband then we say she is fulfilling the spirit of the command. Whereas, if we lived in a Middle Eastern culture where the head covering is understood to be a symbol of submission then we would follow the letter of the law. And interestingly, when some missionaries go into these regions keep the head coverings command in order to communicate this important biblical teaching. Third, all commands can only be fulfilled as we walk by the Spirit. We cannot do it in our flesh. The Spirit is the only means of victory, Rom 8. What does it mean to walk by the Spirit? It means to yield to the Spirit's teaching in the word of God. So we may want to do X but if the word of God says do Y then we yield to the word of God. To accomplish this we must be trained in the word of God so that we can set our minds on the things of the Spirit of God and when we do we fulfill the desires of the Spirit. So three things by way of introduction to commands. First, we have an implied responsibility to obey the commands written to the Church and if we don't we are out of fellowship and need to confess in order to be restored. Those commands that are not written to the Church have value for us but are not required for us to be in fellowship with God. Second, some commands are to be followed in principle only and not according to the letter. If there was a social or cultural element that is not present in our society or culture then we need to be careful about following the command down to the letter of the law. At the same time the principle of the law always applies and we need to follow it. And third, the means of fulfilling the command is to yield to the Spirit of God. You cannot do it in your flesh, you must yield to Him and He is the one who gives us victory through our new nature.

With that introduction to obeying commands, verses 13 and 14 open with five related commands. Each of these relates to each other. **Be on the alert, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong. 14 Let all that you do be done in love.** Taking up the first command, **be on the alert.** The Greek word *gregoreite* means “be in a constant state of readiness.” Now why would you need to be in a constant state of readiness? Only if there was something to be watchful for. There are three things we should be watchful for in the NT. First, for the rapture. 1 Thess 5:6, “so then let us not sleep as others do, but let us be alert and sober...For God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep, we will live together with Him.” The Church is promised to be removed from the world before the wrath to come in the day of the Lord. So then we should be watchful for Christ’s coming for us in the rapture. Second, for false doctrine, Acts 20:29-31, “I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore be on the alert.” False doctrine will come from inside the church and from outside the church. We have to be alert at all times for both avenues of infiltration occurring through false doctrine. Third, in prayer, Col 4:2, “Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with thanksgiving.” The idea of the participle “keeping alert” is to keep in a state of constant readiness for prayer and filling our prayers with thanksgiving. So there are three areas we should be continually ready for; the rapture, false doctrine and prayer. Which one does Paul have in mind in 1 Cor 16:13? The nearest idea in context is false doctrine concerning the resurrection in chapter 15. There were some who were saying there was no resurrection from the dead. Since this false doctrine would negatively affect their spiritual life Paul is most likely saying **be on the alert** for those who carry false doctrine.

The second command in verse 13 is **stand firm in the faith** and this relates to the prior command to be on the alert for false doctrine. So in conjunction with being on the alert for false doctrine they should **stand firm in the faith.** The Greek word *stekete* means “to be firmly committed” in this case to **the faith.** That is, the body of Christian doctrine. They don’t need to be tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine, every newfangled idea that comes down the pike that seems to have some Scriptural support. The problem is

that people manipulate the text by taking it out of context and mixing ideas that don't mix. In other words the Scripture is like a set of puzzle pieces and those pieces can be put together in a systematic way. There is one way the Bible goes together and one picture that it paints. The problem is that people don't pay close attention to grammar and historical context and so they put the puzzle pieces together in the wrong way and come out with the wrong picture. These believers are not standing firm in the faith but are being tossed to and fro by strange linkages resulting in strange doctrines. They need to be stable and firm in Christian doctrine that is firmly established by grammatical, historical, contextual interpretation of the text.

The third command in verse 13 is **act like men** and this also relates to the prior two commands. The Greek word is *andrizesthe* and means "to act courageous." The idea then is to be courageous in fending off false teachers and standing firm in the faith. It takes courage to stand up to false teachers because they often exert themselves in a very powerful way, they can often be intimidating. But you should not be intimidated by them, you should be courageous. Since the masculine side of the human race is naturally bent toward acting in courage then the Greek word is based on the root word for "man." Of course it's not telling women to be men but it is telling them to have courage when there are false teachers trying to convince them of their teachings. This command goes for all believers not just men. Therefore I would translate this "be courageous" or "be valiant." The picture comes from combat and all believers are locked in combat. There is ongoing combat in the heavenly places between the elect angels and fallen angels and that battle is fought here by us in the ongoing conflict between true and false doctrine. Believers must realize that we are in a war for the truth and we must therefore be valiant in defending the truth against error.

The fourth command in verse 13 is **be strong** and this again relates to the prior three commands. The Greek word is *krataiousthe* and in the passive voice as here means "become strong" or "be strengthened." In order to stand firm and be courageous we need to be strengthened in the true doctrines of the word of God. This will require careful study of the word of God in its original context, grammar and history so that we are able to organize the pieces of Scripture into the proper framework and see the whole Christian system. Again, there is only one way to properly organize all the data of Scripture and when we study in depth and learn to correlate the right

passages with one another and not the wrong passages then we see there is a grand system of doctrine where every piece has its proper place. When this system comes into focus it produces a strength that is unconquerable because it's not a verse here or a verse there but every verse flying together in formation.

The fifth command is in verse 14, **Let all that you do be done in love.** As you are strengthened in the word of God so that you can be courageous in standing firm in the faith against false doctrine do not forget that it is an exercise to **be done in love.** All things must be in love, meaning, with the best interests of the other person in mind and not your own. In other words, you might want to be courageous in standing firm in the faith against a false teacher in order to win an argument, simply for the self-satisfaction of defeating someone intellectually. That would not be doing it in love. Doing it in love would mean you were doing it with the intent that God grant them repentance leading to knowledge of the truth (2 Tim 2:24-25).

Now, having drawn out of the text the meaning of these five commands, may I say these are very important to obey! You must be alert to the dangers of false doctrine and you must defend the faith with firmness and courage, but in doing so if your motive is wrong then it is sinful. Put another way, it is sinful to *argue* but it is not sinful to engage in *argument*. There is a wide difference between arguing and argument. *Arguing* is driven by a sinful motive to exalt self. *Argument* is driven by godly motive to defend truth. That may not be an exact clarification of the idea I am trying to communicate but I think you see the difference. Ultimately arguing is not loving but argument is loving because truth is so important. People need to know and believe the truth because it is the truth that sets them free (John 8:31-32). In contrast, if people believe a lie they are in slavery and if we do not confront them we are not loving them. So we must be alert to the dangers of false teaching and be courageous in standing firm in the faith as we are being strengthened by our full, systematic understanding of the truth coupled with love. As Paul said earlier, these three remain; faith, hope and love, but the greatest of these is love. So then **let all that you do be done in love.**

Verse 15, **Now I urge you, brethren,** this is a strong appeal in the Greek text, and let's leave out the parentheses because the Greek text has dashed lines which means it's not necessary to understand Paul's appeal, so we can

leave it out and still understand the sentence. Then we'll come back and apply the meaning of the sentence to the particular case of Stephanas and his house. **Now I urge you, brethren, that you also be in subjection to such men and to everyone who helps in the work and labors.** The key words are the expression **to such men**, that is, men like those in vv 13-14 who are engaged in following these five commands in order to work together and labor in ministering to believers. We'd say Christian workers, those who labor and toil to minister to believers. Those are the type of believers Paul is referring to. If the workers are following the commands of verse 13-14 then you are to **be in subjection to** them. The Greek word **subjection** is *upotasso* which means "to be subject to, to be in subordination to, to be in obedience to." The word always involves an authority structure and in the authority ranking system those who are working and laboring in ministry to believers have authority over those being ministered to and therefore should be obeyed (if they are following vv 13-14). What does Hebrews 13:17 say? "Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you." This is the congregational responsibility to the leadership of an assembly. You should obey and submit to them (if they are following vv 13-14). The Greek word for obey is *peitho* and means "to take their advice and follow it." This will bring joy to them since the advice they give you will be the word of God and therefore it will profit you. The Greek word for submit is *upeiko* and means "to give way to someone's authority, to yield." Since the leaders have authority given to them by God then when you yield to their authority it brings them joy and it is a profit to you since you are following the word of God.

It is a great burden and very difficult to watch over people's souls; the burden is all the greater when it is understood that the souls belong to Christ and they are His sheep that He has instructed leaders to keep watch over them until He returns. So many in ministry experience grief continually because the people they are watching over don't follow the word of God but rebel and so they suffer the consequences even though you tell them a hundred times. I could never have personally imagined what it would be like to keep watch over people's souls. I could never have imagined how many gray hairs it would give me. So follow the word of God and yield to my teaching of the word of God and make my work joyful, don't make it grieving.

That Hebrews 13:17 instruction is essentially the same type of instruction Paul is giving in 1 Cor 16:15-16. He is urging them to submit to the leadership of such men as manifest obedience to the commands of verse 13-14. And an example of such a man and his family is found in the parenthetical remark of verse 15, **(you know the household of Stephanas, that they were the first fruits of Achaia, and that they have devoted themselves for ministry to the saints)**. The **household of Stephanas** was mentioned in 1:16 as one of the only households of believers that Paul baptized. Paul was not sent to baptize but to preach the gospel. And that much shows you that baptism is not a part of the gospel or else Paul could not say I was not sent to baptize but to preach the gospel. So baptism is not a component of the gospel. The gospel is what Paul delivered in 15:3-4 as the death of Christ for our sins and His resurrection. That and that alone is the gospel to be believed. Baptism is for those who have believed the gospel and want to become disciples or students of the word of God. Of course the NT knows no such thing as an unbaptized believer but since baptism is so misunderstood today we have to do some up front explaining. In any case, the household of Stephanas were some of the only believers Paul baptized at Corinth and he says here that **the household of Stephanas...were the first fruits of Achaia**. **Achaia** is the region mainly on the peninsula known as the Peloponnesian peninsula, although Achaia does extend somewhat into the mainland. Athens was the first city Paul visited in Achaia and not many from Athens believed. Corinth was the second city he visited and there were more from Corinth who believed. Therefore **the household of Stephanas** were some of the **first fruits** in Achaia. Now the **first fruits** is an agricultural term used to refer to the first or earliest harvest. It served for the farmer as an encouragement and guarantee of a full harvest to come. Therefore **the household of Stephanas** were some of the first believers in Achaia which served for Paul as an encouragement and guarantee of more to believe which indeed happened (cf 1 Cor 18:1-18, esp vv 8, 9 and 10).

Stephanas and **his household**, which I find interesting since that involves his wife, kids and any servants they may have had, the entire household had **devoted themselves for ministry to the saints**. It wasn't just **Stephanas**, it was **Stephanas** and all his household and that's something I think that goes un-thought of by most people. If you have a man in ministry then everyone in his family is in ministry. And everyone in the family is affected by the ministry. My wife is affected, my kids are affected, they have

to grow up real fast because they can't be sheltered from real life sin problems that you naturally have to deal with; they can't be away from everything that goes on here and they can't have a life outside of this church because this church is their whole life. It's impossible. We've tried, and Paul knew, because he wrote this, that if a man is dedicated to ministering to the saints then it's his whole household that is ministering to the saints because ministry can't be compartmentalized to one individual in the family. Ministry is a family job. And most people don't realize this. Most Christians don't realize that the unsung heroes of the faith are the wife and kids behind the father who's the pastor. The father has to be out in front but who's behind him taking all the flack? Who's behind him having to deal with the fallout that inevitably comes? The wife, the kids. They have to deal with all of it. They have to live with it and they have to continue to function in grace and humility following the father's example. Paul knew that, as he points out in verse 16, it's **work** and **labor** for the whole family. It's not a walk in the park. And frankly, I can say all these things but you don't have a clue what I'm talking about. But if anyone wants to go into ministry come to my office and I'll talk you out of it. If you can do anything else in this world, do that, don't do this. But if you are called to do this you can't do anything else and you should know up front that you are not just committing yourself, you are committing your entire household to the work and labor of ministry. So Paul **urges** them, verse 15, he strongly appeals to them to be in subjection to the household of Stephanas as well as **everyone else who helps in the work and labor** of the ministry. Any who so devote themselves to the work and labor of the ministry should be voluntarily submitted to it if they are following vv 13-14.

Now verse 17, **I rejoice over the coming of Stephanas and Fortunatus and Achaicus, because they have supplied what was lacking on your part. For they have refreshed my spirit and yours.** There was a deficiency of good news from the report Paul had received from the people out of Chloe's house and the letter Paul had delivered to him, probably by these three men. But what was deficient in the Corinthian congregation was supplied by these three men who evidently were spiritual men. So everyone at Corinth was not carnal; there were some who were spiritual and this refreshed Paul's spirit as well as the Corinthians because that's what spiritual people do, they refresh other people's spirit. And it's always good news to find that there are some believers in congregations that are spiritual.

Now verse 19 and here we come to the greeting, there are four parts to the greeting. First, **the churches of Asia greet you.** These churches would include the Church of Ephesus at the core and perhaps some of the churches mentioned in Rev 2-3 which were all in Asia Minor, churches like Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea. And if you went with us on the trip to Turkey in 2008 then you visited these places. It's these churches that Paul sends greetings from. They were all probably established while Paul was at Ephesus for over two and a half years.

Second, also verse 19, **Aquila and Prisca greet you heartily in the Lord, with the church that is in their house.** Paul had first met Priscilla and Aquila in Corinth after they had been expelled from Rome. All the Jews had been expelled from Rome by Emperor Claudius in AD50 due to riots in the Jewish ghetto over one the Romans called Chrestus who we know is Christ. And finally the Roman's got tired of sending soldiers in to quell these riots so they just kicked out all the Jews. Aquila and Priscilla were two Jews who travelled to Corinth and were making a living working with leather. Paul worked with leather so he joined up with Priscilla and Aquila and through the days of working together they both became believers in Christ and when Paul left Corinth he took them with him to Ephesus and when they were trained they formed a **church in their house.**

Churches met in private homes until the early 4th century. They didn't have big buildings until the time of Constantine who made Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire. With the funding of Rome big buildings could be built and maintained and the church grew largely due to the advantages that accrued to those who joined the church. So the church became confused with the state which is never a good idea. In any case, the early church gatherings were typically small groups of believers from the same town who met in various private homes around town. The people considered themselves as one church even though they gathered in different homes unless there was a wealthy family with a large home where all could meet. Corinth appears to have had both smaller homes for regular meetings and a large home where all could meet on occasion as they probably would for reading this letter. The home of **Prisca** and **Aquila** was where one church met in Ephesus and since they had lived in Corinth and become believers there they send their **greeting** along with **the church that is in their house.**

Third, verse 20, **All the brethren greet you.** These would be those at Ephesus who Paul trained. And Paul commands them to **Greet one another with a holy kiss.** The word **kiss** is *philema* and comes from the Greek word for love, *phileo*, it's a friendship kiss and nothing more. Paul often closes his letters with the command for giving one another a holy kiss (cf Rom 16:16; 1 Cor 16:20; 2 Cor 13:12; 1 Thess 5:26) as does Peter (1 Pet 5:14). It was common among believers then and still is in many places in the world. Men would kiss men on the cheek and women would kiss women on the cheek. Once I heard Charles Ryrie tell a story of how he was invited to speak to a group. When he arrived he got off the bus and there was a long reception line of hippie types who each gave him a holy kiss. He was a bit surprised by this but just went with the flow and taught the word. When it was time to go they all lined up again and he got another holy kiss. I remember talking with the men of this church about this in one of the ministry to men classes where we were supposed to evaluate what to do with a command like this one given that it could be misconstrued in our culture and I don't think anyone was too keen on keeping it. Everyone felt that a fist bump or high five was probably sufficient to fulfill the demands of the command. So no holy kisses when we depart today, a fist bump or handshake will do.

Verse 21, **The greeting is in my own hand—Paul.** Paul didn't typically write his own letters for whatever reason. Some people thought he had poor handwriting or that his eyesight was poor. Whatever the reason he normally dictated them to a secretary who wrote them down. But because of the danger of people forging letters as some had done at Thessalonica (cf 2 Thess 2:2; 3:17) Paul began to compose a short greeting at the end of the letter in his own hand. So everything from verse 21 to the end was originally written by Paul.

Verse 22, **If anyone does not love the Lord, he is to be accursed.** The Greek word for love here is *phileo* and not *agape*, interestingly. The word *phileo* here means "to have a special interest in" the accusative of person, who is **the Lord**. If any believer does not have a special interest in the Lord or the things of the Lord then **he is to be accursed**, that is, that believer is under the ban. That believer will lead you away from Christ and therefore should be separated from until he repents and has an interest in the things of the Lord. I would say that these kinds of believers can be identified by their

failure to obey the things of the Lord. Since to love the Lord is to obey Him then believers who do not obey Him do not love Him and we should separate from them.

Maranatha. This one word is an Aramaic word thrown in with the Greek text. Seeing as it was kept untranslated shows that it was an important watchword among the earliest Christians. Barclay says, "It is strange to meet with an Aramaic phrase in a Greek letter to a Greek Church. The explanation is that the phrase had become a watchword and a password. It summed up the vital hope of the early Church, and Christians whispered it to each other, identified each other by it, in a language which the heathen could not understand." Leon Morris said the term **Maranatha** is composed of three Aramaic words **mar** (Lord), **ana** (our), **tha** (come). Ellicot said that it was practically equivalent to the expression in Phil 4:5, "The Lord is at hand." It is a petition that means "our Lord come!" Clearly it does not refer to the second coming of Christ with His church but the rapture when He comes for His church. The word necessarily implies imminence. I remember growing up in my home we had a clock that had written within it Maranatha. I think that communicates well the intention of this word. Our Lord could come for us at any time so we ought to be ready all the time. "It would appear, then, that the fixed usage of the term 'Maranatha' by the early Christians was a witness to their strong belief in the imminent return of Christ. If they knew that Christ could not return at any moment because of other events or a time period that had to transpire first [i.e., the Tribulation], why did they petition Him in a way that implied that He could come at any moment?"ⁱ My good friend Thomas Ice uses this as his greeting in all his e-mails and appropriately so. It's a wonderful plaque or reminder that the Lord can come at any moment, that there is nothing standing between His coming for His church to unite our present experience with our current position in heaven.

The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you. This is a fixed formula Paul places at the beginning and end of his letters. It points up the superiority of the Lord Jesus as the dispenser of the grace necessary to live the Christian life. Verse 24, **My love be with you all in Christ Jesus. Amen.** So the grace of the Lord Jesus and the love of Paul are the closing notes.

What can we take away from this concluding section? First, that we should obey the five related commands in vv 13-14 which all relate to the dangers of

false doctrine and how firm and courageous we must be in the process of becoming more and more strengthened in the faith and that our defense of the faith must be done in love. Second, that we should subject ourselves to those who minister to us in this manner of work and labor. Third, that not all the believers at Corinth were carnal, some were spiritual and this refreshed Paul's spirit. Fourth, that we should encourage and greet other members of local churches who are preaching a clear gospel and agree with us doctrinally. Fifth, that we should separate from believers who are not loving the Lord by obeying His commandments. Sixth, Maranatha, that we should always be looking for and hastening the coming of the Lord for us at the rapture, an event which can occur at any moment. Seventh, that we need the grace of the Lord Jesus to accomplish these things. You can't accomplish anything without the grace of God.

ⁱ Constable, T. (2003). *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (1 Co 16:22). Galaxie Software.

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