

Farewell from Ephesus

1 Corinthians 16:13-24

BI: Paul's final words to Corinth reveal how biblical love should rule over every aspect of life in the church.

This morning it is my intention to finish our study of 1st Corinthians. Believe it or not, it has been three years to the week exactly since we began this study together. The first message was actually on April 19, 2009. Can you believe it? Now, let's see a show of hands: How many of you were here when we began?

I am considering whether I should take one more week to review the major highlights of Paul's teaching in this book so we can finish with a decent understanding of its message as a whole. We'll see.

In the mean time, we still have 12 verses to consider, so let's jump right in.

This final section of the books reveals something of Paul's love for the church; not just this particular local church in Corinth, but the church that Christ is building all over the world. Paul has said a lot of hard things in the fifteen chapters leading up to these final statements, but here at the end he wants to communicate how much he loves them and how much they should love each other because of Christ.

In verses 13-14 we read Paul's final word of exhortation. And it is an exhortation that is rooted in biblical love.

Read v. 13-14

"Let all that you do be done in love." Now, before we move on, let's rehearse the definition of love. Do you remember? "To love is to give whatever I have that you need because God wants me to." (John 3:16; Eph. 5:21; 1 John 4:10 "In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son *to be* the propitiation for our sins").

With that in mind, let's consider the love of God in these final words of the Apostle.

I. We see Paul's love in his Insistence on Godly Character:

1. I think Paul is speaking directly to the leaders of Corinth in v. 13, and by way of application, to every man who claims to belong to Christ. Notice what he says: "Be on the alert, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong." Let's consider each of these briefly.

2. The word *alert* here means to "stay awake" and "be watchful." The reality is that we all tend to become insensitive to the things that God cares most about. For example,

- We are commanded to be alert for the attacks of the enemy of our souls. 1 Pet. 5:8, "Be of sober *spirit*, *be on the alert*. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour." There is

nothing that makes Satan happier than causing a respected Christian to fall and become a reproach to Christ.

- Jesus warned his disciples to be on the alert for temptation. Mark 14:38 “Keep watching and pray that you may not come into temptation; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.” Listen men, if you are not actively and purposefully defending yourself against temptation, you are going to fall. It’s just a matter of time. We need to adopt a warfare mentality that views life not as a relaxing day at the beach, but as a battle for the integrity and purity of our souls.
- We need to be alert for false teachers. Peter warns that there will be “false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies” (2 Peter 2:1). Now clearly we don’t want to become people whose ambition in life is to expose every teacher we disagree with. That’s not being loving. That’s just being a jerk! Nevertheless, we need to have the kind of discernment that can identify any teaching that is going to cause spiritual harm to the church and to our families. This is what godly men do. We love our families and our church by being alert to false teaching.
- We need to be alert in prayer. Paul says in Eph. 6:18, “With all prayer and petition *pray at all times* in the Spirit, and with this in view, *be on the alert* with all perseverance and petition for all the saints.” Loving leaders are committed to prayer for themselves and the needs of those they lead.
- Finally, we need to be alert for the Lord’s return. Listen, the promise of Christ’s return should have a profound effect on our lives. Jesus warned us again and again to “be on the alert, for you do not know which day your Lord is coming” (Matt. 24:42). Peter adds, therefore, “what sort of people ought to you to be in holy conduct and godliness?”

3. So the first characteristic of a godly man is that he remains alert. Second, he is to be “Firm in the faith.” In other words, he should be strong in his commitment to the truth. He is not like those who are “carried away by every wind of doctrine” (Eph. 4:14). This is a man whose mind and resolve are trained by Scripture to know the difference between good and evil—right and wrong. He is a man of conviction who lives under the authority of God’s word regardless of what others think.

4. The third characteristic of a godly leader is summed up in the next exhortation: “Act like men.” In other words, be courageous! Be mature! If there was any hope for the church of Corinth to turn around and become a unified, fruitful instrument in the Redeemer’s hand, it would happen through the leadership of courageous men.

5. Why did Paul conclude his letter with these final exhortations? Because he loved the church. He knew that what this church needed was a group of godly men who were alert to the problems

and needs, who were discerning about the truth, who had an unshakable trust in Scripture, and who possessed the courage of Jesus Christ to do something about it. He loved this church. And that love moved him to exhort them one last time. So, we see Paul's love in his insistence on character.

II. We see Paul's love in his reverence for authority.

1. Read v. 15-16

2. In modern America the idea of authority has long since fallen out of favor. Even in the church, many people are skeptical about the concepts of authority and submission. But Paul knew what many of us have forgotten; that every human institution God has created is rooted in the twin principles of authority and submission.

3. There are basically four institutions God has established. There is the government (Rom. 13). There is the institution of the employer—employee relationship (Eph. 6). There is the institution of the home (Eph. 5-6). And there is the institution of the church (Eph. 5). All of these institutions are based on the principles of authority and submission.

4. Nations, businesses, families, and churches crumble for the same reasons. When the leaders don't lead well and the followers don't follow well, serious problems arise that destroy the basic fabric of those institutions. We see this in churches a lot. Healthy churches have shepherds that are committed to lead, feed, and protect the flock and people who trust, respect, and submit to the leaders God has set in place. That's leadership and submission.

5. The reason Paul exhorted the church to submit to the established authorities is because he loved that church. And he loved its leaders.

6. It's interesting to note from chapter 1 that Paul mentions Stephanas as one of the first to be baptized in Corinth. In fact, Paul baptized him personally. He had become a dear brother to Paul and a faithful leader in the church. Here in v. 15 Paul calls the household of Stephanas "the first fruits of Achaia." They were among the first to believe. And now, years later, they are known as those who devoted themselves for ministry to the saints. Stephanas was a man who could model the kind of character Paul desired to see in them all.

7. So we see Paul's love in his insistence on godly character, is reverence for authority. Third...

III. We see Paul's love in his affection for God's people.

1. Read v. 17-18

2. Stephanas was actually one of the brothers who brought the letter from Corinth to Paul, and Paul was preparing to send him back with this letter that we have studied these past three years.

3. Paul didn't just respect Stephanas, he trusted him and loved him. He had a deep affection for him and for his companions Fortunatus and Achaicus. Paul didn't get a lot of encouragement from the church as a whole, but these brothers were like a breath of fresh air.

4. Notice Paul said (v. 18) "for they refreshed my spirit and yours." Don't you love to be around people like that? Don't you love to be with people whose attitude and conversation refresh your spirit so that you love Christ more; you see the glory of God more clearly and you feel the love of God more personally. These are people who always have a timely word of Scripture to encourage. They are the first to see the glory of God in creation, and the sovereignty of God in difficult circumstance.

5. Don't you want to be that kind of person? Don't you want to be the kind of person who when others think of you they say, "Wow! That brother (or sister) in Christ just refreshes my spirit every time I see him." Stephanas was that kind of brother to the apostle. And it is the kind of people we should strive to be — people who are quick to give whatever we have that they need because God wants us to. That's what love is, and it is so refreshing to those who receive it.

6. But it wasn't just Stephanas and his friends that Paul had a deep affection for. Read v. 19-20.

7. Aquila and Prisca are the same Aquila and Priscilla Paul speaks of elsewhere. Let me take just a moment or two to acquaint you with this couple. Wiersbe writes:

These two were a dedicated husband-and-wife team whose lives and ministries intersected and intertwined with Paul's. The apostle met them at Corinth because, like Paul, they were tentmakers (Acts 18:1-3). This godly couple had been expelled from Rome because Aquila was a Jew; but that was only part of God's providence to get them to Corinth where they could assist Paul.

Priscilla must have been a remarkable woman. This couple's names occur in the New Testament six times, and in four of these instances, Priscilla's name stands first... We get the impression that she was the stronger of the two, a devoted leader and witness. They worked together in serving the Lord and helping Paul.

When Paul moved from Corinth to Ephesus, Aquila and Priscilla packed up and moved their business with him and assisted in founding the church in that needy city (Acts 18:18ff). So capable were they that Paul left them to oversee the ministry while he returned to Antioch. It was while they were at Ephesus that they assisted Apollos in better understanding the truth of the Gospel...

One of the [churches in Ephesus] met in their house, which shows they were people given to hospitality. Romans 16:4 states that, at one time, this dedicated couple risked their own lives to help save Paul...

But Priscilla and Aquila did not remain in Ephesus; for when Paul wrote to the saints at Rome, he greeted this couple there (Rom. 16:3). Once again, they had a church meeting in their house (Rom. 16:5).

8. Listen, beloved, every church needs couple like Aquila and Pricilla. We need men and women who are full of love for Christ, fearless in their devotion to the gospel, committed to hospitality and meeting needs, and ready to pick up and move, if necessary, so that they can be as effective in ministry as possible.

9. Oh, for more men and women like this at Calvary Bible Church! Paul loved this couple. And he wanted everyone in the church to love one another as much as he loved them.

10. One of the indicators that a church is healthy is the obvious love the people have for one another. Verse 20 says, “Greet one another with a holy kiss.” In other words, greet each other with holy affection. In Paul’s day and culture it was a kiss on the cheek. When I go to the former Soviet Union, its obvious that they interpret this literally. The women kiss the women and the men kiss the men... And they do it on the lips! Now we think that’s gross (and it is...), but for them it is a demonstration of deep and holy affection.

11. In our culture men should greet one another with a good hand-shake or even a manly embrace. There are men in this church who will not let me shake their hand. If I try, they just knock it out of the way and wrap their arms around me. And you will find that this will be especially true of those you lead to Christ. “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring [the] good news” (Rom. 10:15). In other words, there is often such deep affection for the person who brought you to Christ that even their yucky, stinky, ugly feet are beautiful in your eyes. There should be much of this in every church

12. That’s the kind of love believers should have for one another. So we see Paul’s love in his insistence on godly character, is reverence for authority, his affection for the people of God, and finally...

IV. We see the Love of Paul in his Longing for Christ’s Return:

1. Read 21-22

2. Paul, like the other apostles, usually dictated their letters to a kind of secretary who would actually write it for him. But it was often Paul’s practice to authenticate that the letter was really from him by offering a final greeting with his own hand. They would see his writing style (big letters) and know the letter had come from him.

3. This final word, however, seems a little peculiar. He says, “If anyone does not love the Lord, he is anathema... he is accursed.” Paul knew that one of the major problems in the church of Corinth was that there were a number of religious unbelievers who were causing problems. They claimed to know God, but they clearly had not true love for Christ. They were, in fact, false brothers.

4. This was kind of a final warning before he signs off. But notice the next word he writes. “Maranatha.” This was a term used often in the early church. It meant, “Our Lord comes,” or “Oh Lord, come.”

5. This is the believer’s ultimate hope; that one day (perhaps today) our Lord will come just as He said. But more than that, the church’s hope is that one day it will be delivered from the affliction of those who have cause her so much trouble. The Apostle Paul longed for the Day of Christ, because he loved the Lord and He love Christ’s church.

6. Now, what better way to end this letter (and our three years of study) than by receiving Paul’s final blessing: “The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you. My love be with you all in Christ Jesus. Amen.

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Key Scriptures:

V. 5

Key Terms

Exegetical Outline 1 Corinthians 16:13-24

¹³ Be on the alert,
stand firm in the faith,

act like men, be strong.

¹⁴ Let all that you do be done in love.

¹⁵ Now I urge you, brethren

(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),

¹⁶ that you also be in subjection to such men
and to everyone who helps
in the work
and labors.

¹⁷ I rejoice over the coming of

Stephanas
and Fortunatus
and Achaicus,

because they have supplied what was lacking on your part.

¹⁸ For they have refreshed my spirit and yours.

Therefore acknowledge such men.

¹⁹ The churches of Asia greet you.

Aquila and Prisca greet you heartily in the Lord,
with the church that is in their house.

²⁰ All the brethren greet you.

Greet one another with a holy kiss.

²¹ The greeting is in my own hand—Paul.

²² If anyone does not love the Lord,
he is to be accursed.

Maranatha.

²³ The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you. ²⁴ My love be with you all in Christ Jesus. Amen.

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