

1 CORINTHIANS 16:18-24

INTRODUCTION

We come now to the end of this book. We have covered many subjects and topics but the greatest need in the church as we saw last time is to apply verse 14 and the principle of love to the life of the church.

The church needed to know in a greater measure God's love within their own hearts and the church needed to practise putting love at the centre of all that they did within the church. This closing section is really an illustration of people who did everything in love.

As we saw last time doing everything in love means being involved in evangelism, being devoted to the service of the saints, being submissive to one another and finally refreshing others by our fellowship with them.

Now as we finish this section we are continuing to think about doing everything in love, which involves

1. SHOWING RESPECT TO FAITHFUL WORKERS (v 16).

Paul instructs the church to respect such men as Stephanas, Fortunus and Achaicus (v 15). The word translated "recognition" signifies "recognition of something for what it really is." For example in 14:37 Paul uses the term to tell the Corinthians to "acknowledge that what I am writing to you is the Lord's command." Now Paul tells us to acknowledge faithful and godly workers for what they are.

Paul is not calling for plaques on walls with the person's name but he is simply calling for respect and appreciation, which sometimes no doubt would be public, and sometimes private. To show proper appreciation of deserving people within the church is not wrong but in fact it pleases the Lord when we do so.

Of course we always have to be careful for we can so easily promote pride in people but we also will discourage people if there is no proper recognition for the service that people do.

However the Corinthian's were not very respectful of such people which is why Paul has to remind them to be so, the church did not appreciate the godly people within the church because each member was too concerned about his own position, power prestige and recognition to think of others. They were much more inclined to criticise others rather than praise them as their criticism of Paul clearly demonstrates. They were too proud to appreciate others or appreciate what others did within the church.

The problem in Corinth was that they had far too many people who loved to be first, and therefore were jealous of any whom they counted to be a threat in their pursuit to be first. We need to be careful here as well for it is so easy because of pride to want to be first within the church that is to want to be seen as important.

Because of our pride we can become so self focused that we fail to see what others do and therefore we fail to acknowledge them. It is sad but true that in some churches those who are godly are the ones often criticised unjustly.

Other Christians sometimes oppose them and the reason behind their opposition is that they see those godly Christians as a threat to their desire to be first and seen as important within the church.

It is also sad that those who are devoted to the service of the saints are often taken for granted and are not appreciated as much as they should be or if they are appreciated no one seems to tell them or shows them appreciation. It is often the ones who are inconsistent in their service who receive the words of encouragement and appreciation because we know that they need that in order to encourage them into more service.

But let us all open our eyes to those who are devoted to service to those who are submissive and to those who constantly refresh us by their fellowship. That recognition can take the form of responsibilities within the church; the fact that someone is appointed to a task within the church is recognition of that person.

When we are looking for Elders and Deacons the sort of people that we are going to recognise for those positions are the very people that Paul asks us to recognise here. Those people who are devoted to serving the saints and are submissive and refreshing.

2. SHOWING CONCERN TO FELLOW CHRISTIANS (vs. 19-20)

When we do everything in love then that will involve hospitality as implied in these verses. Paul is passing on genuine greetings from the churches in the province of Asia because those churches were honestly concerned for their fellow believers in Corinth and their leaders no doubt asked Paul to greet them when he had the opportunity.

Most of those involved in this greeting were strangers to one another but genuine love and concern was expressed because although they may not have known one another they were all in the same family. You see when we love the Lord our God then we will love all who He loves, that means that we will love all true churches who are preaching and proclaiming the same gospel whether we know them or not.

That is why we pray for a church within our Teesside Fraternal most Sunday evenings. Many of those churches and people are not known to us, we may not even know anything about the towns or villages that they are situated, but we can express our love and concern for them through prayer and through greetings etc.

Even though churches and Christians can be separated by great distances and even cultures and circumstances nevertheless there is that bond between all true Christians. A bond that exists so that we can have a genuine concern for them and wish to extend our love to them even though there may not always be a direct opportunity to express that love in practical ways.

Now Aquila and Priscilla had become good friends of Paul's when he stayed at their house during his ministry in Corinth (Acts 18:1-3). It is possible that he stayed with them the entire year and half that he was in Corinth. They were fellow tentmakers, and were highly respected by Paul and were valuable to his ministry.

They accompanied Paul to Ephesus and shortly after arriving demonstrated their thorough understanding of the gospel by taking the gifted Apollos aside and explaining to him the way of God more accurately (Acts 18:18-19, & 24-26). We also know from our verses that the church met in their home. So Paul sends the greetings of Aquila and Priscilla along with the church that met in their home.

Now hospitality like the hospitality that Paul received from this couple was very important in the New Testament. When Christians travelled from place to place they could expect to be entertained with great care and love by fellow Christians. There were no strangers among believers; hospitality was second nature to them it was a natural outgrowth of their love for Christ and for all who

belonged to him. Likewise every Christian home today should be an open home; it should be a transparent and loving haven for those who need our hospitality. It is a way of expressing our genuine concern for God's people.

Hospitality is not an incidental or optional extra for Christians but it is part of our love for Christ and his people. Whether that hospitality is shown by people staying in our homes, or having people come for meals or coffee with us does not matter. What matters is that we show our concern for others. For those who are unable to offer hospitality in their home then we can express our concern in different ways.

We can all pray for our fellow believers and we can all write to those that we may not see or as in this case we can send genuine greetings to other believers even though we may not know them personally. What really matters is that we show our concern for our fellow believers through hospitality and through other means

We live in a world that is increasingly becoming personal. Everybody likes their own space, and no one likes that space-invaded certainty not by strangers. But Christians should be different because if we are to do everything in love then we will have open homes and open lives and will willingly show hospitality to all especially to those who belong to Christ. Let us all excel in this ministry of hospitality.

3. SHOWING AFFECTION FOR OTHER CHRISTIANS (v 20)

Love within the church at Corinth was expressed within the culture of the time with a kiss. In our own culture that sort of affection is only shown to someone of the opposite sex but in Paul's day men kissed men and women kissed women as a show of affection. The kiss was given on the cheek or forehead and it represented what a hug or a warm handshake represents in our own day and culture.

The idea of a holy kiss was a kiss that came from a holy person a saint, another Christian. In the early church this was a meaningful expression of brotherly love for a fellow Christian. Paul is here speaking of the genuine and spontaneous expression of love between two Christian people. What Paul is saying here is that a love for others will mean that we will show our affection for our fellow Christians? Whether that is by hugging or through a handshake or by putting an arm around someone will depend on the person concerned. The actual action does not matter the point is that a genuine love leads to a genuine affection and fondness for God's people, is that true of us?

Do we have a genuine affection for one another? Are we genuinely concerned to see one another and to be with one another? Are we glad when we meet together, or is church simply a duty that we must fulfil or a genuine delight because we are with God's people. Do we show our delight at being with one another? If a stranger comes into our church would they notice our affection for one another?

Would it be obvious that we are joyful because we are meeting with one another? Would they know that this church is a meeting of friends? What about those strangers who are Christians and come into our church. Are they made welcome among us? We do get many visitors who are Christians in our church because we are situated in a tourist area. Do we go out of our way to express our welcome to them?

Are we genuinely glad to see them and to get to know them and to rejoice with them in our knowledge of God?

People show affection in different ways and I am not suggesting that we should express our affection in ways that are not in line with our own personality. But the point is that we must show

people that we are fond of them, that we have a genuine Christian affection and love for them. That we are so glad that they are present and that we are pleased to be worshipping with them.

We need to ask God to increase our love for his people and to help to find ways of expressing our love for the saints.

4. CLOSING REMARKS (vs. 21-24)

The main part of the letter has been dictated to a scribe but the greeting at the end, was written by Paul himself perhaps to simply establish the letter's authenticity (v 21). The ending is in two distinct parts; there is a stern warning and an affectionate affirmation of love.

The warning is against anyone who does not love the Lord. Such a person proves beyond doubt that he or she does not belong to the Lord and therefore does not belong to the fellowship of God's people. The term for love that Paul uses here is not the normal word used of Christian love but a word (phileo), which means to have "a tender affection?" Paul is not saying that anyone who does not love the Lord with that supreme love that Christ had (agape) is not a Christian but Paul is saying that the minimum expectation is that true believers will have a tender affection for the Lord.

If a person does not love the Lord even with a tender affection then he will not have a supreme love for God and therefore is not a believer at all. Such a person is cursed, that is he has God's curse on him like all sinners because although apparently in the church yet such people do not have any love or affection for the Lord and therefore are cursed, in the sense of God's curse of judgement is upon them.

Paul then calls for the Lord to come (v 22). He uses an Aramaic term "maranatha" and I think in this context Paul's genuine desire is for the Lord to come and remove those who are cursed, those who are not real and genuine Christians. Those who somehow or other have been accepted by the church as Christians yet they are not real Christians for they do not have any affection towards the Lord.

Such people are always a great threat to the church of Jesus Christ and it should always be our desire that God will expose and weed out those who have no affection for the Lord.

However within that word "maranatha" there is also an implied invitation to all who are not true Christians to get right with God before he does indeed come and take away that opportunity for salvation which now presents itself to them.

The apostle closes with the words of grace and love for those who love the Lord and those two words, grace and love summarise Paul's message to the Corinthian believers and they summarise the Lord's message to us. I can think of no better way to finish this sermon and this series of sermons than by quoting verses 23-24 to you

The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you. My love to all of you in Christ Jesus.

Amen