

Text: 1 Corinthians 16:5-24

Title: Closing a Long Letter

Truth: Stay the course and acknowledge Christian leaders.

Date/Location: May 2, 2021 at FBC

Introduction

With 95% of the epistle behind us, it is hard to write more introductions! We are writing the conclusion now. In these verses the apostle Paul outlines some personal plans, gives final exhortations, and sends greetings.

I. Personnel Movement, 5-12

The details of locations and times in a passage like this are not applicable to us. However, the way that Paul and the other men plan and the reasons why they plan are instructive. It is also helpful to know how we should receive ministers of the gospel in our churches—with great respect and care.

A. Paul was planning to take a ship, probably, over to Macedonia like he had done a few years earlier. He would pass through there and head south to Corinth. Then, he planned to possibly spend the winter there with them. Then they could send him with some support to his next destination. He wanted to skip seeing the Corinthians in a more immediate time frame because of other travels. He wanted to stay a longer time with them if the Lord permitted.

Meanwhile, Paul had to stay longer in Ephesus to continue his lengthy ministry there (Acts 19:10). He stayed there for some time after writing this letter and wrote more letters to Corinth including 2 Corinthians. What was the reason he wanted to stay? He had very fruitful ministry there that was extending the gospel far and wide. Because of this, there were many adversaries. I caution us that success is not *always* measured by the number of adversaries, but that can be an indicator! Remember 1 Cor. 15:32 where Paul “fought with beasts at Ephesus.”

Paul mentions that he was going to stay in Ephesus until Pentecost. By this we know that Paul is writing in the spring, sometime April-

May timeframe (this year, Pentecost is Sunday May 23). This makes the reference to winter more tangible. He is planning six to nine months out.

The letter 2 Corinthians will reveal that there was a change in plans, but right now, this is what Paul was thinking.

- B. Timothy was likely going to come to the church from somewhere else, but the exact timing was uncertain. As a younger man he might feel some trepidation about showing up there with a letter like the one Paul is just finishing (1 Cor.). The relationship between Paul and the church may have been a little rough at this point, and the church may reflect Paul onto Timothy. The church had factions for Paul and Apollos (1 Cor. 1:12), but it did not have a Timothy faction! Timothy as an understudy to Paul, but Paul exhorts them to make Timothy comfortable because he is a minister doing the same work as Paul. No one is permitted to despise him—say, just because he is young. They should not only receive Timothy, but also send him along in peace to come to Paul who was awaiting his arrival.
- C. Apollos (Acts 18:24-19:1) was requested by Paul to go to Corinth very soon because he would be helpful to them with his preaching gift. However, he simply could not come at the present time, having some other obligation. Even if you are a minister, you cannot feel badly if you have to say “no” or “wait” to a request. You are responsible to weigh the circumstances that you are in and decide what is wise and what is not wise to do—even if one as credentialed as the Apostle Paul asks you to change plans! Apollos would be able to come later and serve the Corinthian believers.

II. Last Commands and Example, 13-18

- A. Paul gives a five-part final exhortation to the church, v. 13-14
 - 1. **Watch.** Keep awake, be watchful, vigilant, alert. Do not be asleep as the wheel or at the switch. Paul is not speaking about this as a parent to a teenaged driver or a small child crossing the street. He is speaking about spiritual watchfulness, likely over oneself and over the church. How important this is because it is

easy to let down the guard and let some little foxes into the church teaching or practice.

2. **Stand fast in the faith.** The verb *stand* is used metaphorically to speak of being steadfast, firm, stable. It is the opposite of falling—into false doctrine, into immorality, into bad thinking and bad language, etc. We are to be stable *in the faith*. Once you have become established in the faith, there are no far movements that are necessary. You are to hold the line, stand still, defend the ground of the gospel, and so forth. Yes, church is the same. It should be basically the same as it was 40 years ago when our church started. Of course, *some things* will change, but the basic, core, fundamental things are not different.
 3. **Be brave.** This is from the verb “to act like a man.” It literally has the root “man” build into it. We could translate “be brave” into colloquial English like this: “man up.” Be valiant, courageous, do not be a wimp. Do not be scared. Men are not to be women. Women are women, and they do a good job of that. Men need to do the hard tasks, make the hard decisions, protect the women and children, work two jobs if needed, etc. Being effeminate as a man is not a virtue; it is a vice. As far as the church is concerned, sometimes we must stand up to what is wrong no matter what the cost socially or otherwise.
 4. **Be strong.** Again, we are not talking about bench pressing ability. It is about being strong in the faith, strong in the Word, strong in self-control and morality, strong in defending the faith, strong in kindness, strong in righteousness, etc.
 5. **Do all things with love.** “All your things in love be.” Love toward God, and love toward neighbor. These two virtues should be actuated all the time, never seized up!
- B. The family of Stephanas was notable among the converts in Corinth, v. 15-18. The text says *household* so it may have been more than what we think of as family. Paul could have in mind servants and extended family members.

1. The Corinthians were familiar with this family. They knew that Stephanas was the first to come to Christ among the residents of Achaia. They knew that the family took up the gospel with gusto and began to serve the saints in a serious way. It may be that Stephanus was an elder or deacon in the church.

Not only did *they* know that, but we are to take that as an example for ourselves. Are we ones who perhaps are the first fruits of Christ in our extended families? (Like this: “I was the first in our family to go to college.”) Have we devoted ourselves to Christian ministry?

2. Paul told the Corinthians to submit themselves to such people. This is one of a collection of such instructions in the New Testament in which Paul exhorts Christians to follow the spiritual example and leadership of people above them. See Hebrews 13:17, 13:7 (for those who have passed), 1 Thess. 5:12; 1 Cor. 4:16, 11:1; Phil. 3:17; 1 Thess. 1:6. If they are good models, imitate them in their faith and conduct. That will put you on a good path.
3. Paul was happy to receive Stephanas and two other companions—Fortunatus and Achaicus—into his company. They were evidently bringing some financial help for the apostle from the church. They traveled from Corinth to Ephesus, which was no small task in that time. Their coming was a great refreshment and encouragement to Paul. Even Paul required uplifting visits because he was no super-human. Again, Paul emphasizes the need to acknowledge such people for their dedication and service to Christ. They are not to be treated poorly.

III. Closing Greetings, 19-24

- A. Greetings from churches and individuals, 19-20a. Paul was writing from Ephesus (16:8) and thus the churches of Asia were very nearby to him. This refers to Asia Minor—not Asia like China or other such locales. Churches included were Colosse, Hierapolis, Laodicea, and perhaps others. Their greetings were deeply meaningful because it indicated a connection in Christ shared in the faith. Aquila and Priscilla also sent greetings to the church.

They had been in Corinth and lived and worked together with Paul, so they knew many of the people very well (Acts 18:1-3). In fact, they were hosting a church in their home.

- B. How to greet one another, 20b. Paul tells the believers to greet one another with a holy kiss. It is almost inconceivable to think that this could be the case today with the COVID pandemic! This is one of those culturally appropriate greetings that has not been done in our culture for some time, if ever. And who knows, as I said some time ago...perhaps the last pandemic wiped out certain greetings like this one has wiped out handshakes! Up until the pandemic, however, certain cultures like those in South America used the kiss on the cheek as a greeting between church members, and even people in the wider (non-church) culture. This was a pure expression of Christian love, affectionate and warm, but with no sexual meaning whatsoever.
- C. Paul's greeting and signature, 21. With Paul's growing level of influence over larger and larger groups of people, there were undoubtedly people that would want to cash in on that power. So, fake letters began to circulate in his name (2 Thess. 2:2). He used his signature not only to put a personal touch on the letter, but to authenticate it was from him (Gal. 6:11, Col. 4:18, 2 Thess. 3:17, Philemon 19).
- D. Pronouncement of a curse, v. 22a

The curse comes from the word *anathema*, also found in Acts 23:14, Rom. 9:3, 1 Cor. 12:3, and Galatians 1:8-9. It is a strong word of condemnation akin to the phrase "devoted to destruction" or "under the ban" in Old Testament Theology. Consider Joshua 2:10 and 6:17. Those "in" the church who denied the Lord Jesus Christ—that is, those who do not love Him, are pronounced by the apostle as accursed. "Let them be accursed" is an imperative form. It is not an empty prayer request, but a statement of what will be. Such people will die in their sins and not be recoverable after that point. This is a harsh statement—I agree with what you are thinking! But if people demand that God "accept" them, why do they not "accept" God? Why should He be obligated to accept you if you hate Him?

So, the question is, do you love the Lord Jesus Christ for Who He is and what He did for His creation? This is another way of asking, “Are you a Christian?” “Are you a follower of Jesus?” “Do you believe in Christ?” “Do you believe the gospel?” All these questions share the underlying substance that is the same. A believer will love the Lord Jesus Christ.

E. Call for Christ to come, v. 22b

The last phrase of verse 22 is from the word “Maranatha” that you might remember from the KJV or NAS Bibles. You might have even read it this way: “Let that person be *Anathema Maranatha*. But that is not correct.

Maranatha comes from an Aramaic word but is written in Greek letters. Unfortunately, those two English translations of the Bible did not in fact *translate* the word, but simply converted the letters of the Greek into their corresponding English letters (*transliterate*). This does not help the English reader to understand what is being said. So, most modern translations do translate it the best they can determine, which is “O Lord, Come!” It is a cry or call for Jesus to return quickly. John the apostle expressed the same feeling in Rev. 22:20.

F. Closing, 23-24. Paul often wishes the grace of the Lord to be with believers. Because they have already experienced the saving grace of God, and they will never be cast off, you might ask what is the point of such a prayer? Can grace *not* be with God’s people? It can never really be absent totally, but it seems to be very sensible to ask for more of God’s favor for yourself and others, to meet the “more” trials and the “more” struggles against sin that the believer faces every day.

Furthermore, Paul extends his warm Christian love all to all the Christians in Corinth. Despite having to say some difficult things in many chapters of the letter, He has a real love for these people. He knows they have not arrived at perfect holiness yet, but he loves them anyway because they are in Christ Jesus. Their love is shared “in Christ Jesus.” If some were not actually *in* Christ Jesus, the special brotherly love did not extend to them in the same way as it did from one believer to another.

Conclusion

And thus, we end our study of the first letter to the Corinthians. It has taught us to be a unified church, a church centered on preaching Christ, a holy church, a church that takes marriage seriously, that understands issues of conscience, a church that flees all kinds of idolatry, that knows about the issues of men and women, that examines ourselves at the Lord's Table, that know and exercise our spiritual gifts, that love one another, that believes in the resurrection of Jesus Christ and of all people, and that gives to support God's work. Just a few things to think about!

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