

Familiarity is expected. Note that the complete name of our Lord is used! "Anathema" is a thing devoted to destruction (Gal. 1:8; Rom. 9:3; Acts 26:11). There is only one end for those who do not truly love the Lord--eternal destruction huge gobs of truth. It is serious.

Opposite to this destruction is the announcement that the Lord is coming. The term "maranatha" comes from the Aramaic with these thoughts. Many have tried to diminish the force of this word, but it stands. It was a watchword of the early believers (1 Thess. 4:13ff.; Phil. 4:5; James 5:7; Rev. 22:20). His coming should provoke carefulness about our love unto HIM! Be true or else you will find trouble in the end. Destruction and blessing are words which have affinity, but separate goals!

- 2) His word about grace. Peter affirms that God has all grace (1 Peter 5:10). Hence, as Paul concludes this letter, he invokes God's grace upon the believers. They had grace to save them (1:4); now he prays for grace to keep them constant and faithful unto the Lord. It is grace from the start of salvation to our entrance into glory (2 Cor. 13:13).
- 3) His word about love. This is the only letter by Paul where he mentions himself after he speaks of the grace of God. But then, there is no other letter like this one! It fits in rightly to a letter full of censure and expresses his aspiration for them. Amidst his rebukes and warnings, he adds his love. It is "my" love and for "all" in the sphere of Christ. Their mutual relationships provoked this blessed experience! Hallelujah.

Conclusion We need more letters like Corinthians to be circulated to set the saints straight in living the Gospel of grace. We need more salutations like given here to unite the saints and relate them to the Lord, one another, and genuine Spirit-wrought love. Amen.

THE BOOK OF FIRST CORINTHIANS

"Maranatha"

1 Corinthians 16:19-24

Introduction

1. This is the end of the Book of Corinthians. The lengthy epistle is about to be concluded, but what an ending!

2. Remember the letter which Corinth had sent to Paul. His is in reply to theirs. They had asked a number of questions (chaps. 7-16). Paul, however, had seen some items which needed comment, hence he forthrightly gave these in the form of strong teaching (chaps. 1-6). What a letter. Most local churches today need a similar epistle. Let it be preached again and again!

3. The final words of the letter provide three lovely salutations. Read the words with great joy and gain blessed comfort for your soul. Here are the three salutations:

1. CORPOREAL SALUTATIONS

a. From churches in Asia. Asia is a province and connotes the whole south-west region of Asia Minor including Phrygia. Colosse, Hieropolis and Laodicea were towns in this area. It may have been that representatives from these churches had brought greetings to Paul and encouraged him to convey them to all to whom he wrote. On the other hand, it is likely that he may have visited many of these places himself and was charged to pass along the greetings (Acts 20:25).

It is wonderful to acknowledge that during Paul's three years at Ephesus a great diffusion of the Gospel took place (Acts 19:10; 26; Col. 1:6; 2:1; 4:13, 16). There was apparently a great solidarity of the churches round about as is evidenced by the Ephesian letter and the fact that Revelation may have been addressed to these churches. There was a blessed fellowship among the local churches of those days which we need to emulate today.

b. From churches in homes. The assembly in the home of Priscilla and Aquila was a common event in the early church. The Greek employs a preposition to show a distribution of these local churches in homes throughout Ephesus. Buildings for worship did not come into vogue until the 3rd century. There is no spiritual virtue to meet in a home. The building adds nothing to the thought of spirituality!

c. From brethren in churches. The disunity at Corinth is embarrassed by what was in Ephesus. There "all" the brethren sent greetings. It points to the unity and ground of love there. The reference is probably to all believers in Ephesus, not in Asia, and to the fact that there was a warm spirit amongst the saints there. The modern fleshly idea of competition was absent!

2. INDIVIDUAL SALUTATIONS

a. Named. The two actually noted in the text are Priscilla and Aquila. Their close unity as husband and wife is marked by the singular in the verb. Would to God every family was so related! These two had previously settled in Corinth and were known to the church there. Indeed, they assisted in the founding of the work at Corinth and Ephesus. They entertained Paul at Corinth (Acts 18:1ff.). Later they risked their lives for him and this may have been while at Ephesus (Rom. 16:4). They had migrated to Ephesus and it is from there that Paul sends greetings to the Corinthians for him. These two are again seen near the end of Paul's life at Ephesus (2 Tim. 4:19).

They sent greetings which were not the ordinary ones because they were related to the Corinthians "in the Lord." It would be well for children of God to note this difference and avoid the worldly sorts of greetings. It was in the sphere of the Lord that really counted! The use of "much" shows they sent intense greetings as well as a quantity of them! God give us true friendships in Him!

b. Conveyed. It is stated that the individual greetings were to be given and associated with a "kiss" for each one. At the Lord's Supper this was done in the early church. The leader of the group did it to the one closest to him and so in order around the entire group. The women did the same on their side of the group. It was a kiss described as "holy" but due to abuses it was set aside. How tragic that such a lovely relationship falls into disrepute! Paul aimed to have it done at the end of the reading of his letter, thus the imperatival form.

3. PERSONAL SALUTATIONS

a. Stated. The authenticity of the letters of Paul is noted by this signature. Wouldn't it be great to have this writing today! If it were available, it would probably be venerated and this would make it useless. In any case, the same construction as here is found elsewhere (2 Thess. 3:17) and literally means: with the hand of me Paul. He usually dictated his letters, but signed them himself (cf. Gal. 6:11; Rom. 16:22). Those who find it difficult to write letters ought to remember that Paul in the midst of all his work still found time to communicate with the believers.

b. Defined. Instead of just finishing off the epistle in an ordinary fashion, the apostle has some firm words to say. Three major items should be underscored:

1) His word about Christ. This concerns two of the most important words in our Bibles. The one is in reference to those who are not born again. That is the significance of the phrase "if anyone love not..." The assumption here is that some did not love the Lord at Corinth. Lack of love for the brethren often presumes lack of love for the Saviour. Some had called Christ accursed (12:3) and now Paul marks these. The negative here shows that there is more than lack of love, it is downright animosity. The Greek verb used here speaks of a warm tender relationship.