

In Conclusion

(1 Corinthians 16: 10-24)

Back on September 7, 2003, we began our study of 1 Corinthians. Today, we come to the last passage in this letter, verses 10-24, where Paul has insight into the practicality of how we are to relate to each other in the church.

If you were here back in the Fall you will remember the Apostle began the letter by dealing with a very awkward situation in Corinth: their internal division. Some of those causing that division definitely opposed Paul. Some of those causing that division championed Paul. Paul dealt with both “head-on,” and he commended neither of them. He told those who were for him and those who were against him that they were wrong. He emphatically declared that spiritual loyalty should never be given to a human messenger. There were many other things Paul had addressed with the Corinthians that were challenging. How would they respond to his hard hitting words?

Perhaps, he would soon find out. Timothy was planning to make a trip to Corinth and would then travel on to Ephesus, where Paul was stationed.

Timothy was like a son to Paul and a fellow worker. What a time for Timothy to visit Corinth! Timothy might arrive and find everyone mad at Paul! He might come to a situation when it was a serious disadvantage to be Paul’s close friend! And so Paul writes to the Corinthians:

10If Timothy shows up, take good care of him. Make him feel completely at home among you. He works so hard for the Master, just as I do. 11Don’t let anyone disparage him. After a while, send him on to me with your blessing. Tell him I’m expecting him, and any friends he has with him.

Paul, is making some requests on Timothy’s behalf. He wants them to treat Timothy in a respectful way. Paul is teaching us something very important here. As those who are members of the body of Christ, the theme of chapter 12, we are to treat each other in such a way that we bless each other and not show disrespect. It can be tempting at times to speak about others disparagingly, or to let others talk about someone else in a demeaning way and we let them get away with it. However Paul wants us to know that as those who belong to Jesus we are not to demean and diminish others but we are to bless each other. When we bless another person it leads to an attitude that is

characterized by peace and concord between one another.

But notice that such a blessing is not a superficial commendation. It is the fruit of deep honesty. I would like to speculate that it was Paul's hope for the Corinthians, that having read his letter and having talked about its contents with Timothy, that the fruit of their time together would result in peace between Timothy and the Corinthians. The peace that in turn would be extended to Paul when Timothy eventually arrives in Ephesus.

So, the first thing we learn about how we are to relate to each other in the church, is that our words are to bring a blessing to others that in turn leads to a deeper unity that is ours in Christ.

Paul then goes on to talk about Apollos in verses 12 "About our friend Apollos, I've done my best to get him to pay you a visit, but haven't talked him into it yet. He doesn't think this is the right time. But there will be a "right time."

A couple of commentators I read have pointed out how in this one verse we are given an insight into how Paul treated others. This verse indicates that Paul does not command Apollos at all; he has no authority over him. Rather, he urges him.

Notice that Paul respects the personal freedom of Apollos to be directed by the Lord, even as he himself is. He does not tell Apollos what he has to do. Rather he reports to his readers that it was not Apollos' will to come, and Paul accepts that. Apollos, too, was operating under the guiding of the Holy Spirit. This is not only true of leaders, such as Paul and Apollos, it is true of all Christians. Perhaps the clearest word on this was spoken by the Lord himself when he said in Matthew 23:8: you have One Teacher, and you are all brothers and sisters.

So the second thing Paul would teach us about relationships, that the church is to be a place where we have a sense of being brothers and sisters with one another, not in position over one another, but working together.

Observe how Paul supports Apollos in this. Apollos will come, he says, "when he thinks the time is right, You remember that Paul and Apollos and Peter were three men around whom factions were gathering in this church. Perhaps Paul wanted Apollos to go because he thought it might improve that situation. But that may be the

very reason Apollos did not want to go. As he might have seen it, and evaluated it, and understood it, his visiting Corinth might even have aggravated the tendency of the Corinthians to cluster around an individual. So he did not choose to go, and the apostle supports him. This is a very helpful glance into New Testament life.

When we then skip down to verses 15-18 Paul mentions some other people within the Corinthian Church.

15Would you do me a favor, friends, and give special recognition to the family of Stephanas? You know, they were among the first converts in Greece, and they've put themselves out, serving Christians ever since then. I want you to 16honor and look up to people like that: companions and workers who show us how to do it, giving us something to aspire to. 17I want you to know how delighted I am to have Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus here with me. They partially make up for your absence! 18They've refreshed me by keeping me in touch with you. Be proud that you have people like this among you.

These three men were the ones who brought to Paul, in Ephesus, the letter from Corinth that he is partially answering with this letter we have been studying. They had given him a report of the conditions of the church there, and, as he says, they had encouraged him and refreshed his spirit. He is remembering the faith of Stephanas and, by implication, suggests that is what we are to do with those who have helped us. Stephanas, he says, was the first convert in Greece. That means he probably was a citizen of Athens, for it was there that Paul first began to preach in Greece.

Remember also, he suggests, the love of these men. Stephanas and his household devoted themselves to the service of other Christians. Stephanas had a problem -- he was an addict. This is what the word "put themselves out" means in the original Greek. He addicted himself to the service of the saints. He did it so consistently and continuously that he was like an addict -- he had become hooked on hospitality. Now we are to remember such men and give heed to them, Paul suggests.

The third point Paul teaches us about relationships in the Church is that we are to look up to those whose lives reflect the generosity of Jesus. Paul seems to be suggesting here that their ministry of hospitality makes them able people with ideas that you ought to listen to. And rejoice in them, as Paul himself did at the coming of these men, because they refreshed his spirit.

Do you know people like that? When you are with them they pick you up, they make your day, they refresh your spirit. Well, rejoice over that, praise God for it, thank him for it. More than that, thank them! That is the last thing Paul tells us -- give recognition to such people

We now come to the closing greetings of the letter:

19The churches here in western Asia send greetings. Aquila, Priscilla, and the church that meets in their house say hello.20All the friends here say hello. Pass the greetings around with holy embraces!

First, the churches greet each other. There are two kinds of churches suggested here. Paul himself was teaching in a rented hall, the hall of Tyrannus, where he taught, some manuscripts say, five hours a day, six days a week. Can you imagine the church that must have crowded and jammed into that hall to hear Paul teach and preach? It was an urban church in the heart of Ephesus, and it sent greetings together with all the spin-off churches that had come out of that remarkable ministry throughout the province.

There is also a house church that sent greetings -- the church that met in the home of Aquila and Priscilla. Paul met this remarkable couple, who appear in several of his letters, in Corinth. They had come from Rome -- after this letter they return there -- and in the letter to the Romans you find them there again with another church in their house.

Then individuals send greetings. Their way of doing this, Paul says, is to greet one another with a holy embrace. The word holy emphasizes all that Paul has said up to this point in this passage. The reason he calls the Corinthians to treat Timothy with respect, the reason he sees Appollos as an equal and is refreshed by seeing Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus is because they are holy people.

Now the word that is used here for Holy is the same one used in the Greek version of the Old Testament to describe the part of the Temple known as the holy of holies. The most sacred place. But as Paul told us in chapter six, it is no longer a place that is most holy, it is the gathering of God's people. "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own? 20 For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body.

One of the ways we honour God is by treating each other as holy. Therefore when we greet each other it is to be with an awareness of this truth. This is especially to be the case when we share the Peace with each other. It is a time when we greet one another with a holy embrace.

Paul then brings this letter to a close by telling the Corinthians reminding the Corinthians of God's grace and his love. The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you. 24 My love be with all of you in Christ Jesus. The grace of God is the favour of God. It is worth noting that this letter began with a greeting of grace in 1:3 and ends with a benediction of grace. Grace is the beginning and end of the Christian Gospel; it is the single word that most fully expresses what God has done and will do for his people in Christ Jesus. God's people are those who rely on nothing else than God's grace and mercy and it is love informed by this grace that determines how we relate to each other in the body of Christ.