

PREFACE

Nearing the end of our study of Chapter Fifteen of this letter, with all its talk of the resurrection of believers when Christ returns for His church, I mentioned that I regretted that we must deal with Chapter Sixteen. How much better, I thought, to go directly from Fifteen into our next study of the Last Things.

As usual, however, Paul and the Spirit of God were holding up their collective sleeves (assuming the Holy Spirit *has* sleeves) a suitable segue in v22—just about at the very end of this letter.

Read 1 Corinthians 16:19-24.**w19-20**

The churches of Asia greet you.

It is Paul's custom to close his letters with greetings to the church from others. Here he offers a threefold version, and the first is unique to this letter: he sends the Corinthians greetings from all the churches in Asia. He is writing from Ephesus, which is the "economic and administrative hub" of the Roman province located in the western part of Asia Minor (Garland).

In subtle ways Paul has been urging the Corinthians throughout this letter to embrace the reality that their church is not an island unto itself—that they are part of a greater whole. He slipped this in even at the beginning of his greeting:

Read 1:2, 4:17, 14:33, (then he gets his back up in) 14:36.

The first paragraph in this final chapter deals with the "collection for the saints," that is, all the churches chipping in for the impoverished and persecuted "mother" church in Jerusalem.

In the first century the gospel was spreading throughout the *known* world wrapped around the Mediterranean. Today the gospel and subsequent assemblies of believers literally wrap around the entire globe. It is no small thing that believers are part of both a local church, as well as the church universal.

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

In our study of Hebrews I revealed my passionate fascination with the mysterious Melchizedek, the priest-king of Salem ([later, Jerusalem](#)). I am almost as fascinated with the extraordinary Prisca (or Priscilla) and Aquila. What an extraordinary couple they were.

We know more about this pair than most of Paul’s associates; even so, the details about them must be filled in with educated guesses. They were fellow tent makers and Jews, who he met for the first time in Corinth after he had left Athens. God’s word records that this husband and wife were more mobile than most—not always by choice, having left Rome by order of emperor Claudius ([Acts 18:2](#)). After Corinth, they left with Paul for Ephesus, where they led the charismatic but ill-informed Apollos to Christ. Later we find them back in Rome ([Romans 16:3-5](#)), and still later back in Ephesus ([2 Timothy 4:19](#)). Everywhere they lived it seems they had a church in their home, which suggests that their tent-making business had made them rather wealthy. They were both strong followers of Christ, and Paul never characterizes Prisca (Luke prefers the diminutive, Priscilla) as Aquila’s wife, ignores the issue of her sex, and, except for here, prefers to list her first—which was *not* the custom in that time and place. The evidence would suggest that they were both strong personalities and leaders, with equally strong faith and knowledge of the gospel. These were two remarkable people from whose lives and witness we can learn much.

All the brethren greet you.

Then Paul includes a greeting from his co-workers and traveling companions. The NIV 2011 and CSB gratuitously add “and sisters,” but the noun *adelphoi* is plural and masculine.

Greet one another with a holy kiss.

David Garland: This kiss is more than an extension of social custom, since it is identified as “holy.” It was a distinctive practice that served as a sign of mutual fellowship among persons of mixed social background, nationality, race, and gender who are joined together as a new family in Christ. For those who came from differing ethnic and national backgrounds it was means to express their unity... Ambrosiaster regards the kiss as a sign of peace that does away with discord, which would be particularly important here in light of the evidence of fractured relationships in Corinth.

v21

The greeting is in my own hand—Paul.

As he has and will do again, Paul—who preferred to dictate his letters (in this case, probably to Sosthenes [\[1:1\]](#))—authenticates the content of this letter with a statement and signature in his own hand. The text from here to the end was probably in Paul’s over-sized, print handwriting ([Galatians 6:11](#)).

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

Love for the Lord is basic; without that there is no individual relationship with Christ, and hence, no church, no body of believers. Love for the Lord was basic to the Jews under the Law, as represented in the *shema*, “Hear, O Israel!”

Read Deuteronomy 6:4-7.

When asked by a lawyer which was the great commandment in the Law, Jesus answered in Matthew 22:37, quoting this passage from Deuteronomy,

And He said to him, "YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND."

The verb Jesus used for “love” was *agapao*, a demonstration of the highest, even sacrificial form of love. In our passage Paul reduces this requirement to *phileo*, an affectionate, brotherly form of love. Even so, if one cannot muster even this nominal form of love for Christ, Paul, declares, one is “to be accursed,” *anathema*.

Tradition, even in the church, and secular media like to portray portions of Chapter Thirteen of this letter in the context of a sappy, squishy, romantic sort of love—which is not at all what Paul means.

Read 1 Corinthians 13:1-3.

The apostle’s point is that no matter what you do as a Christian, no matter with which spectacular gifts you have been endowed, love remains basic. Without it, everything else is utterly worthless, devoid of value. And we cannot help but think back to the painful episodes in the Corinth church that required Paul’s instruction—even condemnation. Forget brotherly love for your fellow man; if one calls himself a Christian, a follower of Christ, and does not possess at least this nominal affection for Him—for who He is, and what He did for you—then you are no better than a worthless idol that is to be thrown onto the fire.

God’s word speaks of love as something far more *tangible* than how it is perceived by society. I can say I love my wife, but if that is not something more active and tangible than a simple emotion, then our marriage could not have lasted fifty years. The concept was drummed into me by my mother whenever I, as a boy, failed to do what she asked: “Don’t *tell* me you love me. *Show* me you love me.” That is, *if you really love me*, she was saying, *then obey me*. Just as Jesus said,

“If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.” (John 14:15)

If this is true regarding our relationship with the Lord, then it applies as well to our relationship with His people: Our faith is just an empty, meaningless shell, something carved out of balsam wood, and worth only being tossed onto the ash heap, if it is not grounded in love.

Maranatha

Opinions vary on why Paul appended to this the expression Maran-atha, which is “the Greek spelling for two Aramaic words” meaning either, “Our Lord, come” (*Marana tha*), “Our Lord has come” (*Maran atha*), or “Our Lord will come.” My position agrees with Garland and Fee, that Paul adds this as, essentially, a warning. Any Corinthians who do not love the Lord should be advised that He is surely coming (at His *parousia*), and that the Lord’s return will bring blessings for some—and condemnation for others. To paraphrase this in our own vernacular, *God requires that we love Him, and if you don’t you will be cursed when He comes to judge—and believe me, He’s coming.*

vv23-24

The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you.

Verse 23 is Paul’s standard grace-benediction with which he concludes his letters. As he signs off each of his extant letters he extends a wish for “grace” (*charis*). If love is foundational to our relationship with God and with His people, His grace is as well. Our relationship with God is possible only through the grace of His gospel: the sacrificial grace of His Son. [Let’s read Paul’s glorious declaration of that in his letter to Ephesus.](#)

Read Ephesians 2:4-10.

My love be with you all in Christ Jesus. Amen.

This closing line to the letter reaffirms my respect for Paul—not just as an evangelist, but one with a pastor’s—even father’s—heart. Recollect what he said in Chapter Four:

I do not write these things to make you ashamed, but to admonish you as my beloved children. For though you have countless guides in Christ, you do not have many fathers. For I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel. (1 Corinthians 4:14-15)

Only here—to the cantankerous, obstinate Corinthians—does Paul extend this personal sentiment. Only here does he say “my love”—not God’s love or Christ’s love, but Paul’s own personal love. His is a genuine love (*agape*), expressed not just in hugs and kisses, but in sharp reprimands, as he has demonstrated throughout this letter. He ends this letter as he began it: with a benediction of grace and love—indeed, his love for the Corinthians is expressed on every page of this letter.