

1CO 16:19-24 "The churches in the province of Asia send you greetings. Aquila and Priscilla greet you warmly in the Lord, and so does the church that meets at their house. 20 All the brothers here send you greetings. Greet one another with a holy kiss.. 21 I, Paul, write this greeting in my own hand.. 22 If anyone does not love the Lord - a curse be on him. Come, O Lord!. 23 The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you.. 24 My love to all of you in Christ Jesus. Amen."

Over the years I've had people ask me what criteria I use in choosing a book of the bible to teach through on Sunday mornings. In other words, why teach through 1 Corinthians as opposed to, let's say, the book of James? Aren't they all a part of God's word and worthy to be taught?

And of course, this is true. Whether it's Genesis or Revelation we can glean things from every part of the word of God. But what I've found over the years is that the Lord has a way of impressing upon me what He wants us to learn at any given time. And in obedience I simply pursue that path and pray that whatever the Holy Spirit has for us that we would all have ears to hear and eyes to see.

In fact, for the last couple of months I've sought the Lord on where He wants us to go next in our study of His word. And as I shared here recently the Lord has impressed upon me that we are to delve into the book of Galatians. I don't know why. I'm just happy to have the privilege to be used of the Lord to instruct and encourage from His word.

But I am looking forward to gleaning as much from this book as possible so that we can all be built up in our most holy faith. And I would say that about any study of God's word that we pursue.

I mention this because we are going to finish 1Corinthians this morning and it causes me to pause and wonder what it is that the Lord has taught us in this portion of His word. I dare say that all of us have gleaned something from this study where the Holy Spirit has personally touched our hearts and has hopefully caused us all to consider how we might be better servants of our Most High God.

This is all Paul wanted for the Corinthians. He has had some hard things to say to these people in this letter. And yet, however hard it may have been for them to swallow the truth it was always given in love and with their best interests in mind. And whenever I teach the word of God this is always my intention.

And so, when I have to teach a hard part of God's word I strive to be sensitive to what the Lord is trying to convey and end on a positive and encouraging note so that we can consider whatever it is the Lord is teaching, but to always do so in a way that edifies.

I've enjoyed teaching through 1 Corinthians. And it's my prayer that you have been able to better understand Paul's heart, as well as the Lord's heart, as he has exhorted this church to consider their role in becoming mature and strong in the Lord as they love each other and seek each other's best.

This is how Paul starts and ends this letter. He points out at the outset of this letter how our love for God, first and foremost, is what gives us the spiritual ability to be able to effectively hear from Him and then to follow Him.

1CO 2:9-10, 12-13 "However, as it is written: "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him" -. 10 but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God.. 12 We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us.. 13 This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words."

The Corinthians had a spiritual problem and Paul had a spiritual solution and it was found in the agape love that God gave them for Himself as they then extended that love to their fellow brethren. And as Paul ends this letter he will once again focus on this love as he shows the Corinthians how much the Lord loves them and how He wants that love extended to other believers.

1CO 16:19 "The churches in the province of Asia send you greetings. Aquila and Priscilla greet you warmly in the Lord, and so does the church that meets at their house."

The churches in the province of Asia would include all of those churches which were in and around the church at Ephesus which was kind of the hub. It's apparent that the churches in Asia were

concerned with the spiritual welfare of Corinth. And I'm sure that the leaders who pastored these churches told Paul that when he got the chance, to let the Corinthian church know that they were thinking of them and praying for them.

There was a connection that was spiritual in nature and that no matter how wacked out many of the people were in Corinth these other churches still loved them and desired to bring them before the throne of God in their prayers.

Keep in mind that they were still on the same team, united in Christ in the same family. It's true of us today. We're all on the same team in Christ and therefore it's imperative that we strive together to keep the peace and unity of the faith with the express purpose of going forward with Christ's work, instead of letting the enemy try and tear us apart.

Paul sends the greetings of the saints and this should have been an encouragement to them. He also sends the greetings of Aquila and Priscilla, or as some of your translations put it Aquila and Prisca. Prisca and Priscilla are the same person. In some of the Greek manuscripts both of these names are found. In all likelihood a scribe simply shortened or altered the name as someone might shorten the name of Thomas to Tom.

But what is important here is to know that two people who were prominent in the work with Paul there in Ephesus were truly interested in the work at Corinth, and as Paul says, they send their warm greetings, which tells us that Aquila and Priscilla knew some of these people as they now send their love to them.

You might remember that Paul first met these two people in Corinth as he was traveling through Greece.

ACT 18:1-3 "After this, Paul left Athens and went to Corinth.. 2 There he met a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had ordered all the Jews to leave Rome. Paul went to see them,. 3 and because he was a tentmaker as they were, he stayed and worked with them."

Somehow in the course of going to Corinth Paul probably learned that Aquila and Priscilla were Christians escaping persecution at Rome. In the process of meeting them he finds out that they share the same trade of tent making. In God's providence these three

hook up to carry on the work of bringing the gospel of Jesus Christ to this area.

After they had brought many of the Corinthians to Christ and formed the church there, over a year and a half period, Paul then left for Ephesus along with Aquila and Priscilla. And so, Aquila and Priscilla knew and loved these people at Corinth. They had spent time with them instructing them from God's word and encouraging them to grow in their faith.

But, in sending their greetings, Paul adds something about the devotion of Aquila and Priscilla by mentioning the church that meets in their house which also sends their greetings.

It seems that wherever Aquila and Priscilla go they are willing to open their home for the church to gather in. I'm sure this was an inconvenience for them in many ways and yet it pleased them to be used of the Lord in this way.

We know that after they served in Ephesus for a while they ended up going back to Rome to serve there, and guess where the church in Rome met?

ROM 16:3 "Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus.. 4 They risked their lives for me. Not only I but all the churches of the Gentiles are grateful to them.. 5 ***Greet also the church that meets at their house...***"

They were servants who were willing to be used of the Lord in whatever capacity and so it seems that wherever they went the local church would meet in their house which in all likelihood included Corinth as well during the time they were there.

They had a personal interest in the spiritual health of this church and Paul is making clear that, despite how the Corinthians had moved away from the will of God, neither he or Aquila and Priscilla wanted to see them continue on that path and were praying that the Lord would sustain them from the attacks of the enemy as they were encouraged to make the right choices for Christ.

But it wasn't just Paul and Aquila and Priscilla who loved these saints in Corinth as we see in our next verse.

1CO 16:20 "All the brothers here send you greetings. Greet one another with a holy kiss."

Everyone in the church at Ephesus, where Paul is writing this letter, has an interest in seeing the church in Corinth come through this trial, this test. And after all that is what it was. For many there in Corinth they had failed the test.

But Paul did not want them to stay in that condition without encouraging them to know the will of God concerning their behavior. Paul loved them too much. And it seems that the saints at Ephesus felt the same way as they send their greetings.

But notice what Paul encourages them to do at the end of verse 20. After sending all of these greetings from different churches in the area of Asia, Paul then encourages the saints at Corinth to begin showing their affection for one another.

"Greet one another with a holy kiss."

By the way, the word greet in the Greek is more than just a warm welcome. It includes the idea of saluting and thus honoring one another. Paul is encouraging them to take the instruction he has given them in this letter concerning love and now express it in a way that shows honor to one another.

This holy kiss was a custom found in Israel among the Jews. It was not uncommon for the Jews attending Synagogue to greet each other with a holy kiss. But it was a sign of affection which was reserved for man to man and woman to woman. In other words, it would have been out of the norm for men in a congregation to go up to a sister in Christ and give her a kiss even if it were on the cheek.

The reason Paul includes the word holy here with kiss is to distinguish it from a normal kiss a husband might give his wife or a kiss a father might give his children. It was holy in the sense that it was meant to be used in the church to show respect for each member who belonged to the same family in Christ. Today we might use a handshake or a hug.

But it was meant to be a natural expression of their love for one another which obviously was to go beyond the simple act of a kiss. Judas kissed Jesus Christ, but it was certainly not a holy kiss done in love for we know he betrayed our Lord with that kiss.

And so, Paul wants the Corinthians to know that any outward expression of affection or love must extend to the way they treat each other in every other area of life, be it the way they serve each other with their gifts, or the way they consider each other as more

important than themselves. It's all tied to the latter part of this letter we know as the love chapter in chapter 13.

As we move to verse 21 Paul is going to make the point that he is personally taking credit for writing this letter, and everything it contains, as the Lord has given him the inspiration through the Spirit. Notice what he says next.

1CO 16:21 "I, Paul, write this greeting in my own hand."

In most of the letters Paul writes he actually has a type of stenographer writing down his words and thoughts as Paul dictates them to him. Many people have thought that the reason Paul did this is because of problems he had with his eyesight. Remember that on the road to Damascus Paul was blinded by the Lord though his sight was restored when Ananias showed up.

There are those who suggest that though his sight was restored it was drastically impaired at some point in his life. And so, just to lend credibility to the fact that this letter, though dictated to someone else, was actually written by Paul, he would often sign in his own hand.

But even in some of those instances he would have to write in large letters just to be able to see what he was writing. This is what we find in the case of his letter to the Galatians.

GAL 6:11 "See what large letters I use as I write to you with my own hand!"

This was his trademark.

2TH 3:17 "I, Paul, write this greeting in my own hand, which is the distinguishing mark in all my letters. This is how I write."

Now the reason this is important in our text is because of what Paul is about to write in verse 22. As if to say that the Lord is personally directing my heart and mind as I write this next part you need to take heed as though the Lord Himself were talking to you through His apostle.

1CO 16:22 "If anyone does not love the Lord - a curse be on him. Come, O Lord!"

Now, this seems like an odd thing to say at the end of a letter especially since the last part of this letter included greetings which are meant to leave them on a light note.

But I'm sure Paul has got their attention at this point. In some of your translations it reads, "If anyone does not love the Lord, he is to be accursed. Maranatha." (NASB)

The KJV puts it this way. "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be anathema. Maranatha."

What does Paul mean by this which he has written in his own hand?

"If anyone does not love the Lord." The word love here in our text is not the word agape which we have come to know through chapter 13. The word for love here is the Greek work *phileo* which means to treat affectionately or kindly, to welcome, befriend. It's the same word Jesus used when asking Peter the third time, do you love me?

It's the same word which is used of the city we know as the city of brotherly love; Philadelphia. *Phileo* conveys that same idea of a brotherly or affectionate love we might have for a family member.

And what Paul is saying is that if anyone does not have a brotherly love for the Son of man, for the one who is our brother and friend as well as Savior, then there is something missing. If we can't even have a brotherly love for Christ, let alone an agape love for Him, then Paul is suggesting that we are devoid of His Spirit who is love and allows us to have that love shed abroad in our hearts.

And he uses some strong language here. If anyone does not love the Lord, he is anathema, or accursed. What does he mean by this?

What Paul means is exactly what he meant when writing to the Galatians.

GAL 1:8-9 "But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned!. 9 As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!"

The phrase, eternally condemned in Galatians, and the phrase in our text, "a curse be on him", or just the word accursed, is the exact same word in the Greek. *Anathema*.

Paul is saying that for those who do not love the Lord in the most basic way, in a way that recognizes that we are part of His family and thus must love Him as part of that family, is eternally condemned. In other words, they are not true believers.

And what makes this even more amazing is that Paul means for this to apply personally to these Corinthians who make up the church there.

Why does he do this? Why does he speak so boldly? Well, keep in mind that it is the Holy Spirit who knows the hearts and minds of these people, and He knows that there were those who only claimed to be Christians when they weren't.

And one of the ways they would be recognized as believers was through their love for one another. The apostle John brings this out in his first letter to the church.

1JO 4:19-21 "We love because he first loved us.. 20 If anyone says, "I love God," yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen.. 21 And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother."

But Paul is saying that their fruit should be in keeping with being attached to the vine who is Christ.

When Jesus spoke of false prophets He used this same analogy.

MAT 7:16-17 "By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? 17 Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit."

Paul is taking this example in our text and saying that there were those in Corinth who were demonstrating anything but love for the Lord, and by this we must say that this is not simply a lapse in love which we all experience, but a lack of love for Christ and the brethren.

His point was to exhort those who were paying lip service to Christ by using a little shock therapy as he pointed out the consequences for not truly believing on the Lord Jesus Christ, which, if they did believe, would produce not only a *phileo* love, but also an *agape* love in their lives.

The other thing this is meant to produce is to wake up believers who are not loving as they should. If an absence of love is indicative of not belonging to Christ, and that there should be a fear of being eternally condemned, then it should show us how important love is among the brethren and for Christ.

And so, this may sound harsh on the part of Paul but he is actually extending grace by waking people up to the danger. And yet, there

is a sense in which Paul might feel that it's too late for some of these people to repent. Not too late in the sense that they will never come to Christ, but too late in the sense that they have adversely affected the church in Corinth and the Lord needs to move them.

The reason we know that this is what Paul seems to be alluding to is because of the word he puts next to anathema. It's the word Maranatha. This is actually an Aramaic word, not Greek. And it was a word the early church used whenever they sought for the Lord to come back.

Now we usually associate this word Maranatha for the second return of Jesus Christ. But in our text this would make no sense. Paul is dealing with those in the church at Corinth who have divided the body. To suggest that his solution to the problem is for Christ to come back and take the believers all away is not consistent with the thrust of this letter.

Now, obviously we would all love for Christ to come and take us out of this world and all the problems associated with it, but in our text Paul is essentially saying, those who do not love the Lord are in fear of being lost forever and if they will not repent then, 'Lord come and personally take them out of the midst of the church and bring peace and unity back.'

This has always been Paul's theme regarding the church. He knows that the only way the church will go forward is if we are loving Christ and each other in an unselfish way. And this is Christ's desire as well as is made clear in the book of Revelation when our Lord addresses the seven churches.

For the work of Christ to go on the family of God needs to be willing to love and promote peace and unity not division and grumbling and backbiting. This was the problem at Corinth and the potential problem with every church. But we need to guard against it. And where we start is where Paul ends this letter.

1CO 16:23 "The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you.. 24 My love to all of you in Christ Jesus. Amen."

It is the grace of God we seek, and the grace of God we live in. When we understand that all of salvation is of grace then we can be grace extenders and allow love to cover a multitude of sins. And this is the only way the peace and unity of the church can flourish. To do anything less breaks up the family. And that is not God's will.

And Paul's closing words. "My love to all of you in Christ Jesus. Amen!"

Despite the fact that Paul had to rebuke the Corinthians on occasion in this letter, it never detracted from his love for them. And he loves them because Christ loves them. And that's really the key. To know that the Lord loves us, and if we can be loved by Him we can love each other.

I love all of you. My prayer is that our love for Christ will grow as we grow in our knowledge of Him and respond in humility and faith. Then our love for each other will grow, and people in this community will see Jesus Christ in us and recognize by our fruit that we have been with Jesus and that He has brought us into His presence and given us the joy of our salvation which can be tasted. Tasty fruit; that's what the world needs.

Taste and see that the Lord is good.