

10,2,25 1 Cor. 16:1-24, Paul's Benediction And Final Exhortations

This chapter, which is the last in 1 Cor., is Paul's benediction to them. There is nothing especially deep or confusing; he's just clearing up a few more things they had asked him about, and writing some closing remarks.

I came across some comments by Ironside that were very similar to something I've been wondering about for a long time. It was encouraging to see that I wasn't the only one, because it almost feels like something I *shouldn't* be wondering about. When I share what he wrote, what I just said will make sense;

Many have wondered why such a seemingly superficial portion of Holy Scripture as this should be preserved for us down through the ages, and have asked what special spiritual help it gives, what lesson it has for the people of God since the days when the apostle wrote it. We can quite understand that there were certain personal things that would be of interest to the Corinthians, but what difference would it make to us whether this portion of Scripture should be lost or not?

See what I mean? We know there is always an application to everything in the scriptures if we can find it; we also know that not one word of the Bible is irrelevant or without significant purpose. But when we see things like 1 Cor. 16:19-20, we might wonder what value that has to us;

The churches of Asia send you greetings. Aquila and Priscilla, together with the church in their house, send you hearty greetings in the Lord. All the brothers send you greetings. Greet one another with a holy kiss.

Like Ironside said, "We can understand that there were things that would be of interest to the Corinthians, but what difference would it make to us. . . ?

One thing I found interesting about this is Ironside's *answer* to that question; he said that . . .

. . . these personal touches in the letters of the apostle Paul and other apostolic writers that prove that these epistles are not forgeries. Anyone trying to write a forged letter to pass off upon people as the Word of God would certainly leave out just such details as we have here, but these are things that come bubbling up from the warm heart of the actual writer of

the letter who was in touch with all these people to whom, and of whom, he speaks.

What hit me personally when I was thinking about all this was the realization that God didn't "dictate" the Bible through its writers. I know that people generally believe that the scriptures couldn't possibly be inerrant unless He *did* dictate, word for word, what He wanted to be included.

But even though I'm certain His sovereignty was in action ensuring the inerrancy of scripture, there was something else at play here also that I think we sometimes overlook.

We touched on this briefly when we studied 1 Cor. 7:25; "I have no command from the Lord, but I give my judgment as one who by the Lord's mercy is trustworthy." Right after Paul wrote that, he went on to give his input on the topic he was writing about and obviously the Holy Spirit wanted what Paul thought about this to be included in the Bible. It wasn't dictated, but it was still absolutely true.

When a man or woman of God reaches a certain level of spiritual understanding through decades of walking with the Lord, much of what they know and say is true because God has worked His own thoughts into who they have become. They no longer just know things informationally; they know them to the depth of their being.

I think that's also what Paul meant in 1 Cor. 2:15-16; "The spiritual person judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one. 'For who has understood the mind of the Lord. . . we have the mind of Christ.'"

The Lord didn't remove the personalities of the authors of scripture when they were writing their letters. He could override any mistakes they would make if He needed to, but they were writing what they themselves had come to understand; and they were also writing what was on their heart.

The reason I wanted to briefly talk about this is because I feel the same is meant to be true of us. We can memorize doctrines and principles, and that's great, but we can also *become* what we learn, in the sense that we can personally grow in our ability to see life through the eyes of Christ as our mind is renewed to see as He sees.

We can never get to a place where we could claim divine inspiration at the level of inerrancy, but that doesn't mean that the Lord can't use us and our unique experiences and personality, to communicate truth to others. As we all know, there are simply some things that we absolutely know to be true. Not just because we've read it or been told it, but because the Spirit of God has affirmed and established it in our hearts.

It could be something as basic as the deity of Christ or the gospel of grace; or it could be a deeper understanding of the Church as the Body of Christ.

I just don't want us to think that as we grow in grace and in the knowledge of Christ, that who we are in Christ (not the old man or the flesh), but who we are as new creations, is somehow negated or stifled.

God isn't replacing us with Himself; He is in the process of developing a completely new kind of humanity made in His image with the indwelling Christ as the Source of our life. The only thing He's replacing in us is all that we are in Adam – in other words, the flesh. He's crucifying the flesh so that our soul and spirit, which are being conformed to the image of Christ, can increasingly find freedom of expression.

Ok, end of my personal 'wonderings'. Let's look at the first 4 verses in chapter 16;

Now concerning the collection for the saints: as I directed the churches of Galatia, so you also are to do. On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper, so that there will be no collecting when I come. And when I arrive, I will send those whom you accredit by letter to carry your gift to Jerusalem. If it seems advisable that I should go also, they will accompany me.

At that time, the Church in Jerusalem was suffering the effects of a famine, so Paul requested that the Corinthians believers do what they could to help them. As Paul wrote in 1 Cor. 12, “. . . when one member suffers, we all suffer.” History is filled with examples of believers in one part of the world helping their brothers and sisters in other parts of the world who are suffering.

This was also addressed in Rom. 15:25-27;

. . . I am going to Jerusalem serving the saints; for Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem. They were pleased to do so, and they are indebted to them. For if the Gentiles (like those in Macedonian and Corinth) have shared in their spiritual things, they are indebted to minister to them also in material things.

To be heavenly minded does *not* make us of no earthly good. Having our mind and meditation on Christ in heaven helps conform us to the image of the One Who loved the poor more than anyone ever has.

Acts 20:35 tells us that “It is more blessed to give and to receive”. I’m sure we’ve all experienced that – but it’s definitely *not* in line with the way the world thinks. The world *admires* sacrifice, as long as someone *else* is doing the sacrificing.

Now, in vs’s 5-11 Paul explains his plans, requests their help, and mentions something about a work he’s anticipating that we’ll need to look at briefly;

I will visit you after passing through Macedonia, for I intend to pass through Macedonia, and perhaps I will stay with you or even spend the winter, so that you may help me on my journey, wherever I go. For I do not want to see you now just in passing. I hope to spend some time with you, if the Lord permits. But I will stay in Ephesus until Pentecost, for a wide door for effective work has opened to me, and there are many adversaries. When Timothy comes, see that you put him at ease among you, for he is doing the work of the Lord, as I am. So let no one despise him. Help him on his way in peace, that he may return to me, for I am expecting him with the brothers.

Most of this is self-explanatory, but there’s one phrase that would be good to touch on; vs. 9, “A wide door for effective work has opened to me, and there are many adversaries.”

Paul ties his ministry as a servant of Christ into two realities that we all need to consider. Whenever the Lord intends to open a “wide door for effective work” there are going to be “many adversaries”.

This is one of the reasons Paul made this statement in Eph. 6:19-20;

Pray for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it fearlessly, as I ought to.

You probably recognized the context of Paul's request. Eph. 6 is the chapter the exhorts us to be armored because of the principalities and powers that we 'wrestle' with. Paul was human, and considering the intensity of the battles he had already experienced, he knew what was coming; and even though he was willing to reenter the battle, he wanted prayer for courage.

The more 'effective' the work is, the greater the opposition will be. There's nothing easy about remaining faithful in what God has called us to do, and not everyone is willing to stay the course when things get extremely difficult.

We won't cover all that Paul went through now, it's spelled out in detail in 2 Corinthians, but it was extremely intense and it never seemed to let up. The same, of course, was true of our Lord's earthly ministry – Satan resisted Him in every way he could, and he will do the same with us if we determine to go forward with the Lord.

What I'm going to do now was *not* something I originally planned to do, but I want to share some thoughts on this conflict we are in.

Because of what we know from other epistles, especially those that have eschatological sections, we know that the first and last generation of the church are the most difficult. The reason for this in relation to *our* time in history is summed up in the following article on the principle of "intensification". We are in the generation of the Lord's return, so what this author brings out regarding the adversary's unique work at this time is extremely important to understand;

There is no mistaking this feature in the relevant teaching of the Lord (such as Matt. 24, etc.), in the Letters to the Thessalonians, in Peter's Letters, and in the Revelation. Intensification to a breaking point is seen to be the state in every aspect of life.

1. The intensification of spiritual antagonism, pressure, and conflict. Every time that the end of any Age or dispensation comes into view in the Bible, this feature is most evident. The evil forces are felt to be

pressing down and meticulously alert and active as though they had no time to lose.

2. Intensification of outward difficulties in Christian life and work.

3. Intensification of Satanic deception. Counterfeits, confusion, mixture (of truth and error), misrepresentation (of Christ, His Church, and His servants). The lie - or "working of error". All this to bring despair through confusion to the people of God.

4. Intensification of a form of Christianity that does not give Christ His true and real place; a Christianity without Christ.

5. Intensification of human sufficiency, importance, and independence.

6. Intensification of war-fever and anxiety, and a temporary respite in which men cry "Peace and safety" and are put off their guard so that "sudden destruction" comes "as a thief in the night".

7. Intensification of alternatives to the Truth. "Many false prophets", and false teachings.

All these can be noted in the Scriptures relating to the Lord's Coming.

So, these are the kinds of things we are up against. I'll give you a brief overview of why I believe this.

We can see the original intensification in the first generation by looking at the persecution of the Church through men like Nero. And this is being repeated in the last generation. There have more Christians martyred in this century than double those martyred in the past 2000 years combined.

The intensification of the current global deception of the Church is immense, as prophesied in the letters to the Corinthians, Hebrews, Timothy and Laodicea.

In the first generation, the Church had begun to lose its first love, as we saw in the letter to Ephesus in Rev. 2. In the terminal generation, our generation, much of the Church is completely blind to both what the Church actually is as well as to what God's purpose for us is at this time in history, again as shown in the letters to Timothy and Laodicea.

We are seeing the rapid and expanding work of our spiritual adversaries in killing and deceiving God's children around the world. The intensification of the enemy's attacks on the Church has greatly increased, as the scriptures predicted it would, because Satan knows his time is short and as his desperation grows, his wrath grows. But, just as God had His Paul's and John's and Timothy's in the first generation, He has provided a faithful remnant scattered throughout the world to represent Him in our generation.

It would be a massive understatement to say that being in the one generation that is to prepare God's people for His return is an "effective work". It's similar to the calling God gave to John the Baptist, though now on a global scale. So, as Paul wrote to the Corinthians, ". . . a wide door for effective work has opened to (us), and there are *many* adversaries."

Because of that, of all the generations in the past, this may be the one in which pastors need to be equipping believers to be more awake, alert and prepared for conflict than at any other time in history. Unfortunately, in many cases, that's not happening. A constant diet of milk does nothing to prepare them for what has come against the Church in our generation. It takes solid food to give us a mature and spiritual understanding of God's Word.

Like we saw in 1 Cor. 2:14, "The soulical man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God . . . nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." Or as this author put it;

To lose spiritual sight is to lose the supernatural feature of the spiritual life, and that produces the Laodicean state . . . be as religious as you like, but when spiritual vision has gone, your effectiveness for the Lord as His servant is also gone.

Once you understand each of the terms, the "Laodicean state" is easy to identify; it's a combination of milk vs. meat and soul vs. spirit.

There is no way that people who try to survive on milk and emotion are going to have the discernment needed to either recognize the deception around us, or to defend themselves against it with God's Word and spiritual discernment.

(Jer. 6:13-14) From prophets to priests, all practice deceit. They offer superficial treatments for my people's mortal wounds.

Contemporary, popular pastors simply aren't giving the children of God what they need to survive the intensity of the deception that is sweeping this world.

Ok, I just needed to spend a few minutes explaining why I believe that this is a critical time in the history of the Church and to show why we have to be going very deep into God's Word so we can build our house on a Rock that will sustain us as the storms of deception try to overwhelm us.

Now, in vs's 12 to 24 we see Paul's final words to this Church; his benediction.

Now concerning our brother Apollos, I strongly urged him to visit you with the other brothers, but it was not his will to come now. He will come when he has opportunity. Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong. Let all that you do be done in love. Now I urge you, brothers—you know that the household of Stephanas were the first converts in Achaia, and that they have devoted themselves to the service of the saints— be subject to such as these, and to every fellow worker and laborer. I rejoice at the coming of Stephanas and Fortunatus and Achaicus, because they have made up for your absence, for they refreshed my spirit as well as yours. Give recognition to such people. The churches of Asia send you greetings. Aquila and Priscilla, together with the church in their house, send you hearty greetings in the Lord. All the brothers send you greetings. Greet one another with a holy kiss. I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. If anyone has no love for the Lord, let him be accursed. Our Lord, come! The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you. My love be with you all in Christ Jesus. Amen.

Since much of this section are greetings and commendations, we will focus on a few verses that need some explanation; and we'll start with vs. 13; "Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong." To get the feel of this we need to see what the original words used in this verse mean. This is from Vine's;

These four exhortations have a military tone; the believers must be as sentinels on guard, must maintain their position, must manifest courage, and must become strong. And the exhortations were evidently needed against insensibility to spiritual dangers, against desertion from the truth, and against moral weakening.

This is another reason this letter to the Corinthians is so important to us today. As we saw when we looked at the principle of intensification, all of the things Vines points out are intensified in this final generation.

To survive at a time like this, the Church will need an advanced sense of clarity related to our position in Christ, the ground we stand on, the spiritual dangers that surround us and the constant pressure we feel to relieve our suffering by ‘deserting from the truth’. It’s always easier to go with the flow; and it always hard to stand your ground when doing so places you in a position that stands against the majority.

Never forget that spiritual peer-pressure is even more challenging than social or cultural peer-pressure.

And you’ll notice that those four exhortations start with “be watchful”, which literally means, “be on high alert”; stay awake spiritually. This is the “Church at sleep” generation and it’s difficult to stay awake, especially during what the scriptures call ‘night watches’. Satan is always looking for weakness and has a medicine cabinet full of sleep aids available.

Matthew Henry’s take on this is good also, he said;

A Christian is always in danger, and therefore should ever be on the watch; but the danger is greater at some times and under some circumstances. The Corinthians were in manifest danger upon many accounts: their feuds ran high, the irregularities among them were very great, there were deceivers among them who endeavored to corrupt their faith. And surely in such dangerous circumstances it was their concern to watch. If a Christian would be secure, he must be on his or her guard; and the greater the danger, the greater vigilance is needful for safety.

In vs. 14, Paul adds; “Let all that you do be done in love.” We would think that this is a given; it’s repeated so many times throughout all Paul’s writings. But it’s easy when we are in conflict and danger to act in ways that are based more on emotion and reaction than on calm, steady love and compassion. So, I personally believe Paul slipped this into this part of his letter to stabilize and remind them that a strong foundation of love is always needed regardless of the storms that surround us.

One other verse that not simply a greeting or commendation, that needs some exploration, is vs. 22, “If anyone does not love the Lord, let him be accursed . . .”

The discussion we’re going to have now around this verse is extremely important, so please do all you can to minimize any distractions and take in all you can get from what Paul is saying in this passage.

First, Paul does not use the word “agapao” for love. We’re familiar with agape and we’ve seen what that means especially in our study of John. But instead of agapao, Paul uses Philéo, which means “tender affection”. Paul’s emphasis is on personal relationship, and as A.T. Robertson describes it;

Philéo denotes personal attachment and is more a matter of sentiment. It is devotion based in the relationship distinguished from agapao which represents devotion based in the will. Philéo is friendship love. Philéo is a fellowship type love manifested in a living and growing relationship between two friends.

Because of the specific types of temptations, dangers and pressures Paul is describing; to stay true to our Lord in circumstances like these, our relationship with Christ needs to have an emphasis on “loyalty” – the kind of loyalty we would have for a close friend that we didn’t want to hurt or let down in any way.

When we studied the letters to the churches in Rev. chapters 2 & 3, and looked at Smyrna, we learned that Polycarp was martyred for his faith, and that when those who were planning to kill him asked him to recant, this was his reply;

At the stake, ready to be burned alive, Polycarp declared, "Eighty and six years I have served Him, and He has done me no wrong. How can I blaspheme my King and Savior?"

Jesus had been faithful to Polycarp all his life; he could never deny His Lord to save himself. That’s loyalty of one friend to another and it was that kind of relationship that kept Polycarp strong when courage was what he most needed.

For those of us who have an extended history with the Lord, that relationship and Polycarp’s words, definitely make sense. And because of the time we are living in, when the Church is filled with a thousand “Jesuses”; we want to do all we can to avoid aligning ourselves with any Jesus that is not the One we know to be the true

Jesus. We want to be loyal to Him and to reject anything and anyone that would dishonor Him – that’s what loyalty or “Philéo” can do for us.

Now, that takes us to vs. 22 “If anyone does not love the Lord, let him be anathema . . .” What does Paul’s warning to those who do *not* love the Lord mean?

When we know what the original meaning of the word Paul used means, it’s not hard to understand what he’s saying. Let’s look at H.A. Ironside’s explanation;

In verse 22 we have a very solemn word before the apostle closes this letter. I wonder whether there are those listening to me who do not love the Lord Jesus Christ. May the Spirit of God give you to realize the solemnity of the warning, “If any man does not love the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema, Maranatha.” What strange expressions! I think the Holy Spirit of God providentially allowed our translators to leave those two peculiar words untranslated. One of them is a Greek word, Anathema, and it means “devoted to judgment”. The other word, Maranatha, is a Syriac word and means, “The Lord cometh”. If you translated the entire passage, it would read like this, *“If any man loves not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be devoted to judgment at the coming of the Lord.”*

There are a couple points Ironside makes that we need to touch on as we wrap up this chapter. First, we have to face the fact that from Paul’s perspective there are Christians who do not “love the Lord”.

Jesus says the same thing in John 14:15 & 21, when He clarifies who *does*, and who does *not*, love Him. As this commentator on those verses points out;

The phrase "Those who love me obey my commandments" is a direct quote from Jesus in the Gospel of John, specifically John 14:15. It emphasizes that obedience to Jesus' teachings is a practical expression of love for him. This idea is echoed in other verses like John 14:21, where Jesus states, "Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, *this* is the one who loves me".

Obviously, Jesus isn’t referring to perfection; no one obeys perfectly; not in this life. 1 Jn. 1:8 tells us that, “ . . . if we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth (the reality), is not in us.”

But as we've seen numerous times in the Corinthian letters, there is a difference between committing a sin followed by confession versus continuing *in sin without* repentance. Falling down and rising back up is characteristic of all growing believers; but turning our backs on God's purpose for us to attach ourselves to an imitation Christianity that we adopt because we are following our own ideas of what we want Christianity to be brings judgement at some point. From the perspective of heaven, it indicates that believers who make those kinds of decisions do *not* love the Lord.

As disciples of Christ, we can disagree on dozens of secondary doctrines and remain in fellowship with the Lord, and with each other. But holding to the *essentials* of our faith definitely fits into the category of what the Lord wants us to do. And *if* we love Him, we will want to obey Him; however imperfect our obedience might be.

Now, in Jn. 2:23-25 it says,

Now when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he was doing. But Jesus on his part did not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people and needed no one to bear witness about man, for he himself knew what was in man.

Vs. 23 tells us that these people were believed – “. . . many believed in His Name”, but they could not be included in the inner circle of His friends; “Jesus . . . did not *entrust* Himself to them.” He knew they were like His disciples in Jn. 6 vs. 66; “After this many of His *disciples* turned back and no longer walked with him.” Jesus knew that at some point they would desert Him. That's something friends don't do. That's not “Philéo” love.

This happened to Paul also, so Paul knew exactly how that felt; (2 Tim. 1:15) “You are aware that all who are in Asia turned away from me.” Asia Minor is where Paul planted all of his churches during his missionary journeys.

Finally, what are the practical implications of the presence or absence of Philéo love, of genuine friendship, as related to this battle of deception we are facing in our generation?

(John 15:15) I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.

Do you want to take a wild guess at what the Greek word translated "friend" is in this passage? It's "philos", which is the noun form of the descriptive adjective "Philéo". It means "fond one", "friend" or "companion".

Those whose relationship with the Lord is what we've been talking about – a relationship of Philéo love – are the ones to whom the Lord has revealed "the Master's business". In other words, they are the Christians who know what the Spirit of Christ is doing in this world and in the Church, while those without this kind of relationship are busy doing Christianity with little or no understanding of what this life is really all about from God's point of view.

The *friends* of our Lord; those who *truly* love Him, come in all shapes and sizes, and none of them are perfect; far from it. All of these verses we've looked at demonstrate the essential characteristic of Philéo love, which, again, is loyalty (friendship), and not all disciples of Christ fit into that category then, or now.

We touched on this in each of the letters to the churches in Rev. 2 & 3 where our Lord used the qualifier of having an ear to hear what the Spirit is saying. This is another way of identifying Philéo love, because our Lord's true friends will listen to Him when He reveals what He wants us to know. And as we saw in Revelation, most do not listen; but all claim to (quote) "love the Lord".

Finally, after all Paul said throughout this letter; all the encouragements and all the warnings and exhortations, he closes with vs's 23-24, "The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you. My love be with you all in Christ Jesus."

These comments by W.E. Vine do an excellent job of showing how, through it all, Paul never stopped loving the Corinthians – which also tells us something very important about our Lord's love for us.

This statement in vs. 24 by Paul is unique and not recorded at the end of *any* of his other epistles. It is as if Paul wanted the saints at Corinth to fully comprehend his deep love for them, love that would not allow him to overlook their manifold spiritual problems, but one which spoke truth to correct, thus speaking the truth with love. Truth without love can be harsh,

but love without truth is a lie. Once again Paul reminds us of the One Who declared "Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; therefore, be zealous and repent. Paul used the adjective 'all' in "My love be with you all. . ." meaning that there were no exceptions regarding those who he intended to be recipients of His supernatural love. Given their many sins, individually and corporately, as a church, Paul is a manifestation of a man filled with God's amazing grace. His Christlike love embraced them all, even the most flagrant delinquents. Like his Lord, Paul's love confronted but then covered a multitude of sins.

There is an incredible tenderness and affection in this Philéo love we see radiating through Paul, and of course, originating in the indwelling Christ. I have always seen the Lord as both King of Kings and Lord of Lords, the Almighty Creator of all things; but I've also come to realize that as true as those things are, there is something else in Christ that we should never lose sight of. Listen to this beautiful description of the incarnate God by Watchman Nee. He's commenting on Jesus' conversation with the woman at the well, and emphasizing the amazing reality that the Almighty God of Creation wants to condescend and desires to have a Philéo relationship with us;

This asking for water is an expression of intimacy. Usually you are afraid of God, but you will not be afraid of one who asks you for water. You are fearful of God, but you will not be fearful of the God who asks you for water. You are frightened because you think of God as high and distant and terrible. But if you know that this lonely, weary and perspiring One (even as *you* are lonely, weary and perspiring) is God, you will trust Him.