

**I CORINTHIANS 16**

Please turn in your Bibles this evening to I Corinthians chapter 16 as we continue our study through the Word of God, and we finish up this letter that Paul wrote to the church in Corinth.

Keep in mind that this was not an easy letter to write because it was a letter of rebuke and correction to the Corinthian church.

And when people hear that they think of hate, they think Paul was intolerant. Not at all!

If Paul hated them, was intolerant of them, he would have left them like they were. He would have done nothing because he just didn't care about them. And there are many people like that today.

Also, what we see today is an issue that many refuse to deal with, and in that they think they are showing love, but the exact opposite is true.

Paul loved the believers in Corinth, and he rebuked them and corrected them to see them restored, not destroyed! True love will act upon situations.

We see that with Jesus. Man was dead in his trespasses and sins with no way out on his own. He could not save himself.

And thus, we see the love of God for sinful man.

In John 3:16-21 Jesus said, **“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God.”**

God does not tell us we are good, but that we are bad and doomed for hell. That does not mean he hates us, that He doesn't love us. He is just telling us the truth, and we need to be aware of our condition.

And the wonderful thing is, God does not leave us in that condition.

His love for us is so great that He became sin for us, and He gave to us His righteousness so that we can have our fellowship with God the Father restored! That is love, it is an action word and it does what is needed to restore.

The problem comes when you try, and they don't listen. The same is true with our Lord. There are those who repent and believe and then there are those who refuse to repent, and they refuse to believe.

That is not God's fault, it is man's choice. But God's love is rich and deep, and we see that here with Paul. His love for the brethren in Corinth was so great that he was willing to tell them what they needed to hear so that they could get right with God.

Now, as we concluded our study last week Paul was admonishing the Corinthian believers as he said these words to them, **“Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.”** I Corinthians 15:58.

In other words, Paul is saying that in light of the resurrection of Jesus Christ which was predicted in the Old Testament and over 500 saw the risen Lord, since He rose from the dead, since He conquered death, so will we.

Our bodies will be resurrected, glorified one day and thus, don't give up, keep laboring for the Lord.

Work hard because all that you do for the Lord is not in vain, it is not empty, but it will accomplish what God desires.

Now as we move into I Corinthians chapter 16 tonight, Paul is going to give to them an opportunity to put into practice this laboring for the Lord and he is going to speak of their giving, the offerings they were making.

With that said, let's begin reading in verse 1 of I Corinthians chapter 16 and let's see what the Lord has for us this evening as we study His Word and we finish up this letter that Paul wrote to the church in Corinth.

## **I CORINTHIANS 16**

### **VERSES 1-2**

What we see here is Paul responding to a question that the Corinthian believers had. And the focus was on giving.

You see, the church in Jerusalem was in need.

Besides the persecution, there was a famine in the land according to Acts 11:27-28.

To put it bluntly, they were hurting big time!

Thus, as Paul went through the churches in Galatia, Macedonia, and Achaia he was obtaining a collection to help these saints out.

Keep in mind that these churches were primarily Gentile in nature and thus, as they gave this gift to their brothers and sisters in the Lord who were in Jerusalem, the Jewish believers, it would help break down the walls of division that were there.

If you remember from our study in Romans, Paul spoke of the Gentiles being in debt to the Jews for all the riches they had given to them spiritually speaking, the things of God.

Paul said, **“But now I am going to Jerusalem to minister to the saints. For it pleased those from Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor among the saints who are in Jerusalem. It pleased them indeed, and they are their debtors. For if the Gentiles have been partakers of their spiritual things, their duty is also to minister to them in material things.”** Romans 15:25-27.

And now they were able to give back and help their Jewish brothers and sisters in the Lord.

Now, what is sad to see today, is that there are those who use churches for a type of welfare program or just to get something for nothing and they go from church to church.

In fact, I have had organizations warn me of people who are doing this.

That is not what the church is about; it is not a welfare program. Yes, the church is to help those in need, (James 1:27) but there is more to it than that. The church must also determine who is in need, (I Timothy 5:3).

If a person can work and doesn't want to work or is just plain lazy, then they are not to be supported by the church. Paul, in II Thessalonians 3:10-11 tells us, **“For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat. For we hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are busybodies.”** (I Thessalonians 4:11, I Timothy 5:8).

Also, we see that if their own family can support them, then the church should not help them, (I Timothy 5:3-4).

If the church supports someone then they need to help the church out by the giving of their time, their skills, (I Timothy 5:5, 10).

And ultimately it is up to the leaders in the church, spiritual men to evaluate the need, even the moral conduct before giving out any support, (I Timothy 5:9-13).

It is not easy, but it does need to be evaluated and I have, or I should say the Lord showed me some who were just using the church for their support, their lifestyle, their story was made-up, and we did not help them out.

Now in saying that, should we then just give money to help those in need instead of supporting the church?

Absolutely not! Paul said in I Timothy 5:17, **“Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine.”**

Yes, we do have a responsibility to help those in need, but our primary responsibility is to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ or we will just become a social institution, feeding peoples stomachs and starving them spiritually speaking.

And notice what Paul says in verse 2, when the church met, “**On the first day of the week . . .**” I know that some like to argue that since we don’t worship the Lord on the Sabbath, on Saturday, we have taken the mark of the beast and we are damned to Hell!

Give me a break. Like I have said, Paul says here that they met on the “**first day of the week**” which was Sunday, Resurrection Day and that was the practice of the early church.

Let me say this, my worship of the Lord is not limited to one day of the week, it is every day and one day is not better than another. If you want to have church service on Saturday, great, for us, Sunday works best.

In fact, Paul said in Colossians 2:16-17, “**So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ.**”

Don’t miss what it is all about, not the day of the week, but Christ, He is the substance of our worship!

Poole put it this way, “It is plain from hence, that the gospel churches were wont to assemble upon that day, [Sunday] nor do we read in Scripture of any assembly of Christians for religious worship on any other day.”

Also, keep in mind that this offering was above and beyond what was normally given to the church and as you read these verses it would seem that the giving to the Lord was a normal part of their worship service.

Now the question is, “How much do we give?” Some say that our tithes should be 10%, I don’t happen to agree with that, I don’t see it in the New Testament.

In fact, in the Old Testament the total that was given to the Lord was about 23%. (10% - Leviticus 27:30, Numbers 18:21; 10% - Deuteronomy 14; and every third year 10% - Deuteronomy 14:28-29).

What do I believe the right amount is to give? I always say, reach deep down into the pocket of the person in front of you and give until it hurts! No, I don't say that. Well, I guess I did.

So what is the right amount to give?

I think Paul gives to us the principle that we should follow in II Corinthians 9:6-7, "**But this I say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver.**"

So do we give more or less than 10% or just 10%?

***YES!***

Give out of a cheerful heart because God will not accept anything if it is given with the wrong motives. We should not give grudgingly or out of compulsion.

In fact, Paul wants the church to take care of this specific offering before he gets there so no one is pressured to give.

One more point regarding our giving before we move on.

In regard to our giving, God challenges us to test Him, to prove Him and He rebukes those who are robbing Him of what is His in Malachi 3:8-11, where we are told, **“Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed Me! But you say, “In what way have we robbed You?” In tithes and offerings. You are cursed with a curse, For you have robbed Me, Even this whole nation. Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, That there may be food in My house, And try Me now in this,’ Says the LORD of hosts, ‘If I will not open for you the windows of heaven And pour out for you such blessing That there will not be room enough to receive it. And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, So that he will not destroy the fruit of your ground, Nor shall the vine fail to bear fruit for you in the field,’ Says the LORD of hosts.”**

God has blessed this church above and beyond, it seems the more we give to spread the Gospel, the more He provides for us.

And when we do the Bible Sticks for the soldiers, or the Haiti water project, or the Haiti truck project and recently the humanitarian aid to Haiti, you are very gracious!

And what we have seen is how the Lord is faithful to His Word, but that is not the reason we give, we give to see people saved, to get God’s Word out. But God won’t force you.

Proverbs 11:24 says, **“And there is one who withholds more than is right, But it leads to poverty.”**

And in Proverbs 3:9-10 we are told, **“Honor the LORD with your possessions, And with the firstfruits of all your increase; So your barns will be filled with plenty, And your vats will overflow with new wine.”**

If you want to increase your resources, give generously, if you want to decrease your resources, then hoard them!

VERSES 3-4

Paul wants them to choose a representative to go to Jerusalem with this gift, a show of love towards the Jews, as they would represent the Gentile church in Corinth. Paul did this to be above reproach in financial matters.

Interestingly enough, the word that Paul uses for “gifts” is CHARIS, which speaks of a free gift; they did not want anything in return.

VERSES 5-9

Keep in mind that Paul wrote this letter in Ephesus on his third missionary journey.

Also, Paul established the church in Corinth on his second missionary journey and you can read of that in Acts chapter 18.

He spent 1½ years there sharing the Gospel and establishing the church. His desire was to go to Corinth, but he leaves it in the Lord’s hands, as He wills!

As we can see, Paul’s plan was to travel to Macedonia for a time of ministry and then winter at Corinth, and then go to Judea with the collection.

You see, from November to February or so, it was impossible to travel by ship, so it would have worked out for Paul to stay in Corinth over the winter and then travel again.

But Paul’s plans did not materialize, he made a quick visit to Corinth and then back to Ephesus. He then went to Troas to wait for Titus, who was sent to Corinth. (II Corinthians 2:12–13; 7:5)

Remember that Paul spent some 3 years in Ephesus on his third missionary journey and he tells us that a door of opportunity opened up for him there to minister the Gospel, (Acts 18:23-19:41).

How did Paul know this was a door of opportunity for him? Because when he arrived, they rolled out the red carpet, they gave to him the keys of the city and-so-on!

Not exactly, in fact Paul tells us he had great opposition there, there were many adversaries there trying to stop him. Acts chapter 19 speaks of both the opportunities and opposition Paul had in Ephesus at this time.

In fact, in II Corinthians 1:8-10 Paul said, **“For we do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, of our trouble which came to us in Asia: [which is the Roman province in which Ephesus was located] that we were burdened beyond measure, above strength, so that we despaired even of life. Yes, we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead, who delivered us from so great a death, and does deliver us; in whom we trust that He will still deliver us.”**

Too often people see adversity and they run or trying to be spiritual they say, “The Lord closed the door.”

Not all the time as we see here.

Think about it, if you have much adversity it must mean the Devil doesn't like what you are doing and if you are just breezing through life without a problem, maybe the Devil isn't worried about what you are doing!

G. Campbell Morgan put it this way: “If you have no opposition in the place you serve, you're serving in the wrong place.”

Let's face it, when you are serving the Lord, ministering to the lost you may begin to ruffle some feathers and that is not necessarily bad!

And, in the days we are living in, when we speak the truth of God from the Word of God, even some in the church get upset with what we are doing!

Gustave Flaubert once wrote, “You can calculate the worth of a man by the number of his enemies, and the importance of a work of art by the amount that it is attacked.”

The reason people in the Bible, and the church today, are so embattled is because the work you do is so important. Coming under attack is not a rare event in the Bible. Nor is it a rare event in the life of any Christian. Sometimes you go through periods of relative calm. But further attacks are almost inevitable.

We must earnestly contend for the faith that has been entrusted to us. We are not pacifists, but we are soldiers in the army of the Lord. And we don’t fight with physical weapons, but we put on the armor of God and we stand strong in His might!

It is as Paul said in Ephesians 6:12-13, **“For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.”**

Too often Christians just give in to false teachers and teaching. They don’t contend for the faith. They may say things like, “Well, I know that is not right, but I have friends here and I don’t want to leave!” Or, “Well, that is wrong but for the most part, what he teaches is right!”

If you were having major surgery and the doctor was just all right, would you go to him? I don’t think so. I think you would find a surgeon who is great.

And yet, when it comes to teachers and teaching, we are willing to compromise what we believe in and before long, we are taken down this dangerous road of false doctrine, false teaching!

Listen to what we are told in Jeremiah 6:16, **“Thus says the Lord: ‘Stand in the ways and see, And ask for the old paths, where the good way is, And walk in it; Then you will find rest for your souls. But they said, “We will not walk in it.””**

How sad this is. Jeremiah is warning them, the Lord is warning them to go back to the old paths, the teaching of God and don't fall prey to the false teaching, the false doctrine. But they would not go for it, they were too entrenched in the new and thus, by the time you get to the last days church, the church of Laodicea, the Lord is outside the church knocking to get in! They have moved so far away from God that God is not even allowed in the church!

My friends, be in the Word of God, don't deviate from it, and put on the whole armor of God that you may be able to stand in the Lord against the scheming's of the Devil!

Let me also say this. We need to be careful in our walk that we are not so rigid in our daily schedules that Divine appointments become a nuisance and an irritation that just wrecks our day!

God knows what He is doing and if He is going to interrupt your day, it is for a reason and He will take care of the time from your studies or whatever, as I have found out!

As Morgan wrote, “I know the fascination of having a programme, and having everything in order, and knowing where we are going; but let us leave room, at any rate, for the interference of God.”

How true that is! And Paul was a man who was open to change, as the Lord led him!

#### VERSES 10-11

According to Acts 19:22 Paul sent Timothy and Erastus to Macedonia and then Timothy was to go down to Corinth.

Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus, who brought Paul a letter from the church in Corinth in the first place, probably delivered this letter to the Corinthians. Some feel that Timothy was also involved in bringing this letter to Corinth.

Also, keep in mind Paul had trouble with the Corinthian Christians not respecting his authority as an apostle and as a minister of the gospel.

And, if they didn't respect Paul, what might they do to a young man like Timothy?

So, Paul asks the Corinthian Christians to respect Timothy when he comes.

And Paul did have a right to be concerned about their not treating Timothy with the respect he deserved, as a servant of God.

Paul tells us in I Corinthians 4:6-13, **“Now these things, brethren, I have figuratively transferred to myself and Apollos for your sakes, that you may learn in us not to think beyond what is written, that none of you may be puffed up on behalf of one against the other. For who makes you differ from another? And what do you have that you did not receive? Now if you did indeed receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it? You are already full! You are already rich! You have reigned as kings without us - and indeed I could wish you did reign, that we also might reign with you! For I think that God has displayed us, the apostles, last, as men condemned to death; for we have been made a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men. We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are wise in Christ! We are weak, but you are strong! You are distinguished, but we are dishonored! To the present hour we both hunger and thirst, and we are poorly clothed, and beaten, and homeless. And we labor, working with our own hands. Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we endure; being defamed, we entreat. We have been made as the filth of the world, the offscouring of all things until now.”**

Thus, Paul is giving them a heads up in regard to respecting Timothy when he comes!

### VERSE 12

Here we see Paul urge Apollos to go to Corinth and minister to the brethren, but Apollos felt it was not the right time, so he stayed back.

So Paul, being an apostle, forced him to go?

Not at all, Paul encouraged Apollos and then left it up to him, it was his decision and Paul felt he was mature; God would guide him.

Of this Ironside said, "I would not like to tear this chapter out of my Bible. It helps me to understand God's way of guiding His servants in their ministry for Him."

Some ask me what they should do in a situation, and unless it is sinful, goes against God's Word, I tell them to pray and God will direct.

I may give some advice, but I will not tell someone what they should do, that is up to God! And that is what we see here with Paul and Apollos!

### VERSES 13-14

I love these verses.

Paul is exhorting them to be vigilant, pay attention, be on guard, be strong! Why did Paul exhort them to watch, to stand fast, to be brave or really act like a man, to be strong?

Because false teachers are out there and they are looking for those who are not watching, for those who are not standing fast, who are not brave, who are not strong so they can devour them with their false doctrine, their false teaching!

Of this Clarke tells us, “The terms in this verse are all military: Watch ye, watch, and be continually on your guard, lest you be surprised by your enemies . . . Stand fast in the faith – Keep in your ranks; do not be disorderly; be determined to keep your ranks unbroken; keep close together . . . Quit yourselves like men [or be like men] – When you are attacked, do not flinch; maintain your ground; resist; press forward; strike home; keep compact; conquer . . . Be strong - if one company or division be opposed by too great a force of the enemy, strengthen that division, and maintain your position . . . summon up all your courage, sustain each other; fear not, for fear will enervate [weaken] you.”

Frist of all, today, being a man is a negative thing! They have called it today – ***TOXIC MASCULINITY!***

Listen to this report and I will show you what I mean. We are told,

There is a popular (and controversial name) for the concept that men can suffer negative psychological consequences from trying to live up to traditional ideas of what it means to be men: “Toxic masculinity.”

The idea, which has taken root in popular culture, originally started as a concept along the lines of what Olivia Petter once wrote in “The Independent”: That toxic masculinity “dictates that men should be stoic and strong, both emotionally and physically,” and recognizing that as a problem provides men an opportunity to rethink “what it means to be a man today, and what is generally expected of them by society.”

But outside of academic circles, It's seemingly taken on a meaning - that all conceptions of masculinity are bad - that may be as toxic to men as the negative ideas it was initially meant to tease out. Psychologist Gad Saad, for example, has written that the term "toxic masculinity" itself pathologizes masculinity "in ways that are harmful to the existential sense of self of young men."

- <https://nbcnews.to/2UNUIZy>

In other words, men need to be more like women! I don't think so and that is the problem today, even in the church. We have families where the wife is the head of the family and the husband, well, he is mister Casper Milk-Toast! He is told what and when to do things. The spiritual decisions are left up to the wife. That is so wrong and there is no order in a family that has the wife the head of the family. Sorry, that is just the way it is.

We need to take a stand as men, we need to fight for our families, we need to fight for our nation! There is nothing wrong with that, even though some are trying to tell us there is.

You see, Paul goes on to say, "**Let all that you do be done with love.**" I Corinthians 16:14.

You see, that is the key to this section. All we do must be done in love, **AGAPE** love or else all that we do is meaningless in the eyes of the Lord and in the eyes of others.

But it is so sad that we don't take a stand, for the most part today. It is amazing to me what some Christians believe, the false doctrine they hold onto!

And the reason is simple, they were not prepared for the battle, they were not ready.

Paul tells us in II Timothy 2:1-15, **“You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also. You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier. And also if anyone competes in athletics, he is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules. The hardworking farmer must be first to partake of the crops. Consider what I say, and may the Lord give you understanding in all things. Remember that Jesus Christ, of the seed of David, was raised from the dead according to my gospel, for which I suffer trouble as an evildoer, even to the point of chains; but the word of God is not chained. Therefore I endure all things for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory. This is a faithful saying: For if we died with Him, We shall also live with Him. If we endure, We shall also reign with Him. If we deny Him, He also will deny us. If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself. Remind them of these things, charging them before the Lord not to strive about words to no profit, to the ruin of the hearers. Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.”**

And yes, we all need to stand strong in the Lord, we need to watch, we need to stand fast, we need to be brave. But there is an attack against men today to make them more like women, as I have said, and it seems like they are winning this battle. ***STAND STRONG AND BE A MAN***, there is nothing wrong with that!

VERSES 15-18

First of all, Achaia was the Roman province that extended over central and southern Greece, of which Corinth was the capital.

The household of Stephanas was the first converts for Paul in this area and we are told in I Corinthians 1:16, **“Yes, I also baptized the household of Stephanas. Besides, I do not know whether I baptized any other.”**

Now as some read that they believe Paul is speaking of infants also being baptized because it speaks of the **“household of Stephanas.”**

Again, we need to look at the totality of the Scriptures and what they say, not just pick one verse and misinterpret what is being said. It doesn't say infants were baptized, not at all!

We are told in Acts 2:38 by Peter, **“... ‘Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.’”**

And in Acts 18:8 we are told, **“Then Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his household. And many of the Corinthians, hearing, believed and were baptized.”**

I think that is clear. The first thing they need to do, we need to do, is repent, come to that saving faith and then be baptized because we are now saved!

And here in I Corinthians 16:15, in speaking of the household of Stephanas, **“that they have devoted themselves to the ministry of the saints”** means that Paul is not speaking of infants because they are involved in ministry, they are devoted to service and think about it, how many infants are involved in ministry?

Think about this, it is not that difficult. Infants can't even repent of their sins and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ!

You see, it takes a lot just to figure out if they are hungry, want their diaper changed or who knows, and thus, infants are not baptized into the faith. We wait until the child can grow and can repent of their sins, believe on the Lord Jesus Christ!

And remember what baptism is all about. Baptism is just a declaration of what you believe, it doesn't save you, Jesus does!

Now let me just say a few words about church leadership. I think this will just make sense to you.

One of the primary qualifications for church leadership is the willingness to serve.

I know that sounds funny but many like the title, not the work.

But not the household of Stephanas, they had no title, but they just served! In fact, the word "**devoted**" is TASSO (tas'-so) in the Greek and it means, "to set in order."

In fact, this word is so powerful that in the King James Version this verse goes like this, **"I beseech you, brethren, (ye know the house of Stephanas, that it is the firstfruits of Achaia, and that they have addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints,)."**

I Corinthians 16:15.

I think my wife would say that about me. I love serving the Lord, I love to teach His Word, I love to do whatever He desires me to do. I am addicted to my service to my God!

William Barclay writes, “In the early church willing and spontaneous service was the beginning of official office. A man became a leader of the church not so much by any man-made appointment as because his life and work marked him out as one whom all men must respect. All those who share the work and toil of the gospel command respect, not because they have been appointed by man to an office but because they are doing the work of Christ.”

That is it exactly. I just watch people, what they do, how they are involved, and I watch God raise them up into various ministries!

Interestingly enough Fortunatus and Achaicus were common names for slaves and Stephanas may have been their owner, their master at one time. It is a possibility.

But now they are free in Christ and they are brothers in the Lord!

And notice that when these men arrived, they refreshed his spirit seeing their love for the Lord even though this letter that was brought to Paul had some very disturbing things that Paul had to address.

When you meet the brethren are you refreshing to them or sour?

Do you help build the fire or rekindle the fire or do you douse it completely by what you say?

I have known people who are like that, by the time you are done talking with them you are ready to end it all! Not any of you, I am very blessed with the people that God has brought into this church. You are such a blessing and encouragement to me and hopefully I am to you!

These men, they lifted Paul’s spirits, they refreshed his soul, and may we do that to others as we spend time with them.

VERSES 19-20

When Paul speaks of Asia it is what we call Asia Minor today. Remember, that is where the churches that Jesus wrote letters to in Revelation chapters 2 & 3 were located. And Ephesus was one of them.

Paul tells the Corinthians that the brethren send their greetings along with Aquila and Priscilla, some of Paul's dearest friends.

This couple fled Rome in 49 A. D. when Claudius issued an edict ordering the expulsion of all Jews from the city and they fled to Corinth where they met up with Paul and spent 1½ years with him there.

They traveled to Ephesus where they established a home church, continuing to serve the Lord. Thus, the Corinthian believers knew this couple and Aquila and Priscilla are sending their greetings to them in Corinth!

Keep in mind that Christians met in homes for the first few hundred years. In fact, Morris notes that the entertaining room in a moderately well-to-do household could hold about 30 people comfortably. Therefore, in any given city, there were probably many different "house churches."

And the earliest known church building is the Dura-Europos church, which was converted from a regular house in around 233-256 A. D.

So Aquila and Priscilla opened up their home to believers, they had a home church!

Now what about this holy kiss?

This holy kiss was a Jewish custom that was picked-up by the early church. Even today you see people from the Middle East greet people this way, with a kiss on the cheek.

Now if Paul were around today and writing a letter he might say, “Greet one another with a holy bear hug!”

Times change and so do greetings.

#### VERSES 21-24

Paul dictated this letter to a secretary you might say but now Paul adds his own personal touch to this letter by his own handwriting.

Some feel Paul had a very bad eye condition and he couldn't see very well and in Galatians 6:11 Paul tells us, “**See with what large letters I have written to you with my own hand!**”

Whatever the case, this is his own personal note to the Corinthian believers done in his own handwriting.

Now, in verse 22, Paul says, “**If anyone does not love the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be accursed. . .**”

That word, “**accursed**” translates the Greek word anathema.

That seems harsh but think about it. Those who do not love the Lord Jesus are condemned already, but their doom will be manifest at the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And thus, Paul says, “**O Lord, come!**” It is the word, MARANA THA, which is an Aramaic expression.

Those who love the Lord are waiting for His return.

As Paul concludes this letter, in verse 24, he wants the Corinthian believers to know, to understand that this letter of correction and rebuke was not done out of a heart of anger or hatred but out of love, **AGAPE** love.

Paul's desire was for them to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Samuel Rutherford described how to grow in love to Jesus: "Strive to make prayer, and reading, and holy conference, your delight; and when delight cometh in, you shall, little by little, find the sweetness of Christ, till at length your soul be over head and ears in Christ's sweetness. Then shall you be taken up to the top of the mountain with the Lord, to know the delights of spiritual love, and the glory and excellency of a seen, revealed, felt, and embraced Christ; and then you shall not be able to loose yourself off from Christ, and to bind your soul to old lovers; then, and never till then, are all the paces, motions, and wheels of your soul in a right tune and spiritual temper. But if this world and the lusts thereof be your delight, I know not what Christ can make of you; you cannot be metal for a vessel of glory and mercy. My desire is that that Lord would give me broader and deeper thoughts to feed myself with wondering at his love. I would I could weigh it, but I have no balance for it. When I have worn my tongue to the stump in praising Christ, I have done nothing to Him. What remaineth then, but that my debt to the love of Christ lie unpaid for all eternity!" (Cited in Meyer)

May we grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. May we keep falling in love with Him over and over and over again!

Let me also say this. Yes, Paul's words were harsh, but Paul not only spoke with words, he lived what he believed, he practiced what he preached, and it was all done in love.

Now some of the Corinthians received what Paul had to say, they repented and got right with God, they accepted his authority, and others did not.

Thus, in II Corinthians Paul is going to defend his authority and as we will see next time as we begin this letter, it is one of the most personal letters that Paul wrote, a letter showing us the heart of Paul, committed to the work of God, the building up of the body of Christ in love!

As we close this evening, let me leave you with these words, “**Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.**”

Or as The Amplified Bible puts it, “**Therefore, my beloved brethren, be firm (steadfast), immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord [always being superior, excelling, doing more than enough in the service of the Lord], knowing and being continually aware that your labor in the Lord is not futile [it is never wasted or to no purpose].**”