

Life Group Notes

Sunday 02 July 2017

Title: Conclusion and Cliffhanger

Passage: 1 Corinthians 16:15-24

In this last section of the letter, Paul continues his closing appeals to his Corinthian brothers and sisters.

V15-16 Submit to those who work hard in the Lord.

Stephanas' family were Paul's first converts in Asia and the first evidence that God was with him blessing his endeavours. Their lives were turned upside down by God for joy and they turned their lives upside down devoting themselves to the service of God and his people. Paul tells the church to submit to people like this.

V17-18 Face to face fellowship brings life

Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus have brought the "report" to Paul. It's off the back of their visit to him in Ephesus that 1 Corinthians gets written. Paul genuinely longs for the Corinthians as a father for children.

These men have given up their time and money to visit Paul. They have refreshed Paul by being personally with him. Don't let technology fool you into thinking connecting over social media is a substitute for meeting and connecting face to face, person to person, heart to heart.

V19-20 Family Greetings

Paul always finishes off his letters with greetings. Prisca and Aquila are a top married couple who get special mention as they are with Paul now and were with him in Corinth when he first arrived to preach the gospel. They partnered with him in earning money as tentmakers to support themselves and in planting the church and so would have been well known and loved by the church. They will have served God faithfully for decades and risk their lives to serve Paul (Rom. 16:3)

What is a kiss? A small intake of air into the mouth. Symbolically, it's the taking of someone into yourself. It's evidence that they dwell in your heart and as they kiss you, it shows that you live in their heart. Healthy families show much affection to each other as well as looking out for each other. That is how the church should be.

V21-24 Assurance and Warning

Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus would have vouched for the authenticity of this letter having visited Paul, so Paul's writing is, more than anything, a sign of affection.

In calling down a curse on those who do not love the Lord, Paul isn't so much wishing harm to others, rather he is saying that if after all that God has done for you in Christ, you're still not satisfied then God has nothing left He can give you. There's nowhere else to go, except into the eternal night of walking away from the love and light of Christ. Loving Christ is defined by covenant faithfulness not emotional intensity. Jesus said "if you love me, you will obey my commands"

Paul utters a prayer "Our Lord, come!" A prayer asking for the Lord to return. A prayer for the second coming. When will the second coming happen? When the great commission is fulfilled. Matt.24:14. Do you want Christ to return sooner or later? If we love Christ, then why do we say in our hearts, don't come back just yet, Lord? Many of us spend more time hoping that we will live long enough to meet our grandchildren before

we die than we do hoping that we will see Christ return in our lifetime. 1 Peter 3:12 tells us that we should live the kind of lives that bring forward the return of Christ, not delay it. If you were engaged to be married and your fiancée kept putting back the date because they wanted to do other things first, what would you conclude about their love for you?

In closing his letter, Paul wants them to know he is for them, but that doesn't mean he is blind to their faults or that their faults don't matter. The Corinthian church is at a crossroads. There are many good things about the church, but there are also dynamics at play that could, if left unchecked, rip the church apart and destroy its witness. And so the letter ends with a cliffhanger. What will the Corinthians do, will they listen to Paul and repent, or will they ignore him and continue to let the cancers they have spread through their church body?

But more than that, God loves this Corinthian church and Paul loves the Corinthian Church too – all of them. Not just those who side with him, but all of them. He is a good apostolic father, he has no favourites. The rich and the poor, the married and the unmarried, the fervent and the backsliding, the more charismatically gifted and the less charismatically gifted, the presentable ones and the un-presentable ones, the strong and the weak... He longs for them ALL to know God better and to mature in the love of the God who has loved and called them to live with Him forever.

Questions

1. Who should you be submitting to in our Church family? Who are those who have devoted themselves to serving you and others?
2. How can you ensure you cultivate healthy face to face relationships in church life? What are the temptations / dangers of doing too much life through our phones?
3. How can you cultivate genuine family affection with your brothers and sisters in the church?
4. How can you be more like a Prisca and Aquila, enduring long in the service of God and his people?
5. What obedience is God asking of you right now? What needs to happen so that you can do it? Why is obedience the greatest expression of love for God a human can give?
6. Do you want the second coming of Christ to happen sooner or later? Why? What does that say about your love for Jesus? What in your perspective needs to change?