

# **Challenges Christians Face**

## **Final Greetings**

*1 Corinthians 16:15-24*

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# Final Greetings

## Scripture

We continue our study in *The First Letter of Paul to the Corinthians* in a series I am calling *Challenges Christians Face*.

One of the challenges that Christians face is the issue of love in the church.

Let us read about it in 1 Corinthians 16:15-24:

**<sup>15</sup> 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—<sup>16</sup> be subject to such as these, and to every fellow worker and laborer. <sup>17</sup> I rejoice at the coming of Stephanas and Fortunatus and Achaicus, because they have made up for your absence, <sup>18</sup> for they refreshed my spirit as well as yours. Give recognition to such people.**

**<sup>19</sup> The churches of Asia send you greetings. Aquila and Prisca, together with the church in their house, send you hearty greetings in the Lord. <sup>20</sup> All the brothers send you greetings. Greet one another with a holy kiss.**

**<sup>21</sup> I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. <sup>22</sup> If anyone has no love for the Lord, let him be accursed. Our Lord, come! <sup>23</sup> The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you. <sup>24</sup> My love be with you all in Christ Jesus. Amen. (1 Corinthians 16:15-24)**

## Introduction

Our culture writes fewer letters than in previous generations. Ours is an “email” culture. Nevertheless, even when writing a long email to someone we want to close with a strong conclusion.

The final command in Paul’s letter to the Corinthians is found in verse 14. It is: “Let all that you do be done in love.” The next ten verses—the final verses of the letter—flesh out and illustrate Paul’s command. In these verses Paul talked about love in the

church. Because love was hard to find in the Corinthian church, Paul's final command to them was about love. The final section of the letter began with a command to love (16:14) and concluded with the assurance that they themselves were loved (16:24).

## Lesson

So, in today's lesson we learn about love in the church.

### I. Marks of Love in the Church (16:15-20)

First, then, let us look at the marks of love in the church.

In verses 15-20 the apostle Paul gives us seven marks of love in the church.

#### A. *A Mark of Love in the Church Is Evangelism (16:15a)*

The first mark of love in the church is evangelism.

Paul said in verse 15a: **“Now I urge you, brothers—you know that the household of Stephanas were the first converts in Achaia.”**

**Achaia** was on the southern end of Greece. Corinth was located in the province of **Achaia**. **The household of Stephanas were the first converts** on Paul's second missionary journey in the province of **Achaia**.

Why did Paul work so hard in evangelism? Why was he so passionate about reaching the lost with the gospel?

It was because of love. First John 4:19 says, “We love because [God] first loved us.” Paul experienced the wonderful love of God in his own life. Prior to his conversion Paul hated God and the things of God. But then God dramatically intervened in Paul's life. Paul experienced the love of God and was completely transformed from a God-hater to a God-lover. Moreover, Paul also discovered a deep love for people as well, especially those who did not yet know the grace of God in Christ. And so he devoted his life

to telling people about salvation, even at great hardship to himself.

Someone has said, “Evangelism is the sob of God. Evangelism is the anguished cry of Christ over a doomed Jerusalem. Evangelism is the call of Moses: ‘O this people have sinned, yet now if Thou wilt, forgive them; if not, blot me, I pray Thee, out of the book Thou hast written.’ Evangelism is the heartbroken cry of Paul: ‘I could wish myself accursed.’ Evangelism is the cry of John Knox: ‘Give me Scotland for Christ or I die.’ Evangelism is the weeping in the night of the parents of an unsaved child.”<sup>1</sup>

The first mark of love in the church is evangelism. Do you love people so much that you want to tell them about Jesus?

*B. A Mark of Love in the Church Is Ministry (16:15b)*

The second mark of love in the church is ministry.

Paul said in verse 15b: “. . . **and that they have devoted themselves to the service of the saints.**”

Once Stephanas and his household became Christians they loved other believers so much that they served them in ministry. This was more than just light duty. They threw themselves wholeheartedly and zealously into ministry. The Greek word for “**devoted**” means “to do something with devotion.”<sup>2</sup>

Henry Martyn had already done more than his share of missionary service in India by his late 20s when he announced he was going to Persia. Doctors had told him that the heat would kill him if he stayed in India, and the heat in Persia was worse.

Martyn arrived, studied the Persian language and translated the New Testament and Psalms in an amazing nine months. But then was told he must have the Shah’s permission to circulate it.

Martyn traveled 600 miles to Tehran, only to be denied permission to see the Shah. He then turned around and made a 400-mile trip to find the British ambassador who gave his credentials

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<sup>1</sup> John MacArthur, *1 Corinthians* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1996), 479.

<sup>2</sup> Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*, electronic ed. of the 2nd edition. (New York, NY: United Bible Societies, 1996).

and said, “This is all I can do. You will have to present them yourself.”

Barely able to stand, Martyn rode at night on the back of a mule and rested in the daytime, protected only by a strip of canvas from the sweltering heat. He was received by the Shah who gave permission for the Scriptures in Persian to be circulated.

Ten days later, in 1812, he died in Turkey.<sup>3</sup>

When people get converted to Christ, they begin to serve in the church of Christ. Some, like Henry Martyn, have remarkable gifts and serve in significant ways. Others have more ordinary gifts. Nevertheless, all Christians use their spiritual gifts in service.

A mark of love in the church is ministry. Have you **devoted** yourself **to the service of the saints**? Are you serving in ministry?

*C. A Mark of Love in the Church Is Submission (16:16)*

The third mark of love in the church is submission.

Paul said in verse 16: “. . . **be subject to such as these, and to every fellow worker and laborer.**”

We are to submit ourselves not only to officers in the church but also to all those who are faithfully engaged in the Lord’s work. In other words, there is a submission that is to be given to all fellow Christians.

Proper submission is a key theme of Spirit-filled living. Listen to some verses that speak about our submission to one another:

- All believers are to submit to each other. Ephesians 5:21 (*NIV*) says, “Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.”
- Wives are to submit to their husbands. Ephesians 5:22 says, “Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord.”
- Children are to submit to their parents. Ephesians 6:1 says, “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this

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<sup>3</sup> Paul Lee Tan, *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations: Signs of the Times* (Garland, TX: Bible Communications, Inc., 1996).

is right.”

- All people are to submit to the governing authorities. Romans 13:1 says, “Let every person be subject to the governing authorities.”
- Young men are to submit to older men. First Peter 5:5 says, “Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders.”

Jesus himself said in Matthew 20:26b-28, “But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

All great ministry leaders have come to understand and practice servant-leadership. When I was a young Christian I was invited to a Christmas Eve dinner at the home of a friend. Several friends and family members were at the dinner, which numbered about twenty people. One of the distinguished guests that evening was the elderly Presiding Bishop of our denomination. I was an awestruck young Christian, delighted to be having Christmas dinner with the Presiding Bishop. After dinner I noticed that people starting clearing the dishes. Since I was one of the younger people at the table I thought that I had better help. I was blown away when I got into the kitchen to see the Bishop washing the dishes! It hardly seemed right for me to go and sit down while the Bishop washed the dishes. So, I started drying the dishes with the Bishop. I not only had an extremely useful conversation with the Bishop that evening, but I also learned a powerful lesson about servant-leadership.

A mark of love in the church is submission. Are you in submission to **every fellow worker**? Or do you seek to lord it over others?

*D. A Mark of Love in the Church Is Companionship (16:17-18a)*

The fourth mark of love in the church is companionship. Companionship is not something we directly do or give. It is

the by-product of other things, things as simple as standing with a friend who is in trouble or sitting with someone who is sick, or as complex as mutual ministry. The main ingredient of companionship is *togetherness*. Companionship cannot be experienced from a distance, secondhand, or on Facebook.

Paul said in verse 17: **“I rejoice at the coming of Stephanas and Fortunatus and Achaicus, because they have made up for your absence.”** These men came to be with Paul in Ephesus, and their presence was a tremendous encouragement to him. In fact, Paul said in verse 18, **“For they refreshed my spirit as well as yours.”**

The Greek word for **“refreshed”** is interesting. It is the Greek word *anapauo*. It is the same word that Jesus used in promising “rest” to those who believe in him in Matthew 11:28, “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest [*anapauo*].” God has made us not only for himself but also for each other. What Jesus promised to do for his followers is what **Stephanas and Fortunatus and Achaicus** did for Paul.

Do you know what it is like to be refreshed by someone? Sometimes when pastors work with some people they call them “EGR” people. Do you know what an “EGR” person is? “EGR” stands for “Extra Grace Required.” Basically, that means that extra grace is required in dealing with that person.

On the other hand, there are believers who are just simply refreshing to be around. You look forward to being with them, and after you have spent some time with them, you feel uplifted and refreshed. That is what Paul is describing in these verses.

So, another mark of love in the church is companionship. Are you a true companion? Do you refresh the spirits of others?

*E. A Mark of Love in the Church Is Respect for Faithful Workers (16:18b)*

The fifth mark of love in the church is respect for faithful workers.

Paul said in verse 18b: **“Give recognition to such people.”**

The Corinthians were instructed to **give recognition to** Stephanas and Fortunatus and Achaicus. The Greek word for **“recognition”** (*epiginosko*) means “to acknowledge.”<sup>4</sup> Paul was encouraging the Corinthians to recognize them as the faithful, godly workers they were.

Paul was not saying that the Corinthians were to set up statues or plaques for these workers. He was simply calling for respect and appreciation for their service to the Lord. This could be done publicly or privately. The Lord affirms that godly servants are to be properly recognized for their service.

Interestingly, faithful workers do not seek recognition. They humbly serve God and do not seek recognition. Nevertheless, proper honor and recognition is appropriate for faithful workers.

Recognition and affirmation is a powerful thing. Sarah Scherf wrote the following article about an affirmation she received from her Dad:

I spent last week at the beach in Florida, relaxing with my family. The week was for eating fresh seafood, sitting by the beach with my nieces and sister, throwing the Frisbee on occasion, and for catching up with my dad and his new wife.

My parents are divorced, and the process of their dissolution took about nine years. I had erratic and often intensely negative feelings for and about my dad throughout my high school and college years; those feelings have mellowed out, and as adults we get along okay. We live 1,200 miles apart and don't see each other often, but I'm always glad to visit my dad when I can. This beach trip was his and his wife's initiative, and they provided a big place for their family and me and my siblings to meet up and spend some time together.

But at the week's end my dad said something to me that left my mind quiet and full of one thought. At the end of a perfect day of hunting for shells with the little girls, making a sleeping dragon sand sculpture, and laughing hard with my sister and dad, we had

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<sup>4</sup> James Strong, S.T.D., LL.D., *A Concise Dictionary of the Words in the Greek Testament and The Hebrew Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 2009).



to pack up the car and pass around goodbye hugs. My dad hugged and kissed me. His arms are still so strong and tight; no one's hugs feel like his. He told me again how thankful he was that we could be there, and he told me he was so proud of me.

I have to admit, after hearing those words from my dad, my 29-year-old self was filled. I think I can guess that my dad's been proud of me; I'm at least sure he's not disappointed in who I am or what I've done with my life. But hearing him say it to me—despite all our past and its residue, despite my independence from him, despite the deeply affirming relationship I have with my husband—it was like I've needed nothing else.<sup>5</sup>

Verbal affirmation is powerful.

One way we show love in the church is respect for faithful workers. Have you taken time to give a word of affirmation to someone who is a faithful worker in the church?

*F. A Mark of Love in the Church Is Hospitality (16:19-20a)*

The sixth mark of love in the church is hospitality.

Paul said in verse 19-20a: **“The churches of Asia send you greetings. Aquila and Prisca, together with the church in their house, send you hearty greetings in the Lord. All the brothers send you greetings.”**

These **greetings** are not mere formalities. They are expressions of genuine love. All Christians have an authentic love for other believers.

**Aquila and Prisca** (also known as Priscilla) had become good friends with Paul when he stayed at their home during his ministry in Corinth (see Acts 18:1-3). It is possible that he stayed with them the entire eighteen months he was there planting the church in Corinth. The church in Corinth met in their home, as verse 19 says.

In the first-century church the homes of believers were used for almost every type of activity—for eating together (Acts 2:46),

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<sup>5</sup> Sarah Scherf, “Still a Daughter,” Kyria.com (3-28-11).

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for teaching and preaching (5:42), for pre-evangelism and evangelism (10:23, 27-48), for worship and preaching (20:7), and for witnessing and discussion (28:23).

When Christians traveled from place to place during the first century they could expect to be entertained with great love and care by fellow Christians. There were no strangers among believers (Acts 2:42-46). Hospitality was second nature, a matter of course, and a natural outgrowth of the love for Christ and, therefore, for all who belonged to him. Since all believers are brothers and sisters in Christ, it was normal to welcome family members into the home.

Every Christian home today should be a home in which hospitality is practiced. That is quite simply a mark of love.

Do you practice hospitality in your home?

### *G. A Mark of Love in the Church Is Affection (16:20b)*

And the seventh mark of love in the church is affection.

Paul said in verse 20b: **“Greet one another with a holy kiss.”**

The common form of greeting in Biblical times was a kiss on the cheek. It is much more like the way I noticed Mexicans greet one another when I visited there.

Basically, a **holy kiss** is simply a warm, visible sign of Christian love for a brother or sister in Christ. In our culture it might be a hearty handshake or appropriate hug.

We need to let brothers and sisters in Christ know that we really care about them—especially those who are shy or who tend not to be noticed.

Former boxing writer Harold Conrad visited a women’s prison with heavyweight fighter Muhammad Ali. “All the inmates lined up,” wrote Conrad. “They were ooh-ing and aah-ing as he went along. There were some good-looking ones. But he kissed only the ugly ones.” After they left the prison, Conrad asked the fighter to explain why he chose to kiss only those women. “Be-

cause no one ever kisses 'em,” responded the man who called himself *The Greatest*. “Now they can remember that Ali kissed 'em!”<sup>6</sup>

Every human being needs to be loved. Surely the church should be the one place where love is evidenced by warm affection for one another.

Do you express your love to others by warm affection?

## II. Words of Challenge to the Church (16:21-24)

And finally, notice the words of challenge to the church.

Paul said in verses 21-24: **“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.”**

These final verses have two distinct parts: a stern warning and an affectionate affirmation of love. I just want to focus on the warning, which are given in terms of a challenge to the church: **“If anyone has no love for the Lord, let him be accursed.”**

Clearly a person who has no love for Jesus does not belong to him or to the church. The way in which love for Jesus is shown is by obedience to his commands. Jesus said in John 14:15, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments.” So, a person who is not obedient to the commands of Christ is showing that he does not love Jesus. Therefore, Paul warns, **“let him be accursed.”**

## Conclusion

Let us take heed to Paul’s final greetings, which teach us about love in the church. Examine yourself. Do you see evidence of the marks of love in your life? If not, take heed to the warning that is given. Amen.

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<sup>6</sup> Rubel Shelly, “Starting Today,” reprinted in *Men of Integrity* (May/June 2003).



# Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ  
and **membership** in his church family,  
develop them to Christlike **maturity**,  
equip them for their **ministry** in the church  
and life **mission** in the world,  
in order to **magnify** God's name.*

## Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

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1. [www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/Sermons](http://www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/Sermons)
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**PRAYER:**

O Lord our God, I thank you for *The First Letter of Paul to the Corinthians*. It is a wonderful letter filled with exhortations and warnings, examples and illustrations, and principles and practices that guide us in our relationship to you.

I pray that the marks of love that Paul delineated in the conclusion of this letter will be evidenced in a clear and unmistakable measure in our church.

And for this I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

**BENEDICTION:**

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and always. Amen.

**CHARGE:**

Now, brothers and sisters, go and love as God has called us to love!