

Ending with Love

Corinthians Explained

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Bible Text: 1 Corinthians 16:22
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Congregation, I'd like to consider with you the last chapter of 1 Corinthians and with the 16th chapter. The main text for me is verse 22,

22 If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema
Maranatha.

So far.

Congregation, there are four sections in this chapter. In verses 1 through 4 is about the recommendation to have collections for Jerusalem. In verses 5 through 9, Paul shares his thoughts on what his schedule is like, where he's traveling to, where he often spent his time. In verses 10 through 20, Paul speaks highly of a number of fellow Christians, mainly officebearers. And in verses 21 through 24, Paul finishes with some bold statements and greetings. Let me simplify this: the theme "Ending with Love." Ending with love. He's ending this chapter with love: collections in love, the schedule made in love, recommendations in love, and special greetings in love.

So the first thought: collections in love. Congregation, we just had the collection. I saw the deacons going through the church with the bags and I saw many hands putting something in there. So there is money in those bags over there. Is that even proper to do that on Sunday? Is it not dirty money? Is it not something we should do on Monday or Tuesday or Wednesday instead of having money in church as if people have to pay for it and people have to acquire something? You know, actually money is holy and if someone puts his hand in that bag, it's actually a holy action. That is a spiritual thing when someone says, "Lord, I thank thee for thy mercy and I also would like to donate something." It is a holy thing that's very spiritual. It is not worldly. It is not dirty.

In the Bible, that collection is often or rather is sometimes, I would say it's sometimes called a sacrifice and sacrifices are holy, aren't they? Sacrifices in the courtyard, sacrifices in the tabernacle on the altar of incense, the smoke going up to the Lord as a well-pleasing fragrance pleasing the Lord, something acceptable to the Lord. That's a sacrifice. And we know also in the New Testament that there are sacrifices of praise. When we sing praises that's also a sacrifice. Let me show this is so from the Bible that

collections are holy, collections are spiritual, collections are sacrifices, that collections are things that should be done in love and in faith.

Philippians 4:18, "But I have all," Paul said, "I have all and abound: I am full, having received of Epaphroditus the things which were sent from you, an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, wellpleasing to God." So the Apostle Paul says, "Thank you for the collections, for the donations that's acceptable and well-pleasing to God. It's a sweet smell. The Lord loves it. The Lord likes it." Do you see that? Have you expected that? Are we ever conscious if we put something in the bag that it is something holy, something spiritual, something in thankfulness, a sacrifice, sweet odor, well-pleasing?

Or think of Hebrews 13, "But to do good and to communicate," to share, "forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased." If someone donates in thankfulness, in appreciation, that's a sweet odor, that's a sacrifice well-pleasing. Not just pleasing, well-pleasing to God. It's really important to him. It's not just something administrative.

So what do we read in the first verses of our last chapter? "Now concerning the collection for the saints," a collection for the saints, for God's people as well, and sometimes collections for the poor. "Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye." Have collections, please. Have collections for the saints. Have collections for the congregation of Jerusalem. That's what it says because, dear congregation, Jerusalem was poor. We don't know why. Was there famine maybe? Or were they discriminated against and persecuted? We don't know but what we know is that from Jerusalem the gospel went to Asia Minor, to Galatia and all those provinces, and those congregations were rich and Jerusalem was poor. So therefore he was asking for collections and he said, "Do that on the first day of the week." On Sunday. "Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come." So don't wait with the collections. Don't do that within a month or two or so. Do it on a regular basis. Do it every week. Why don't you do it on Sunday, you're in church anyway? It's a holy thing. So on the first day of the week, the week of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus when you're in church, let there be gatherings and do it on a regular basis where it is not too much at once but it is divided over the year, divided over the month, over the weeks. What wisdom.

"As God hath prospered him," according to his ability, according to the riches the Lord has provided so that the poor ones give their percentage and the rich ones give maybe a higher percentage, according to their ability, according to how they have prospered, "that there be no gatherings when I come. And when I come, whomsoever ye shall approve by your letters, them will I send to bring your liberality unto Jerusalem." Do you see, to Jerusalem so there might be a delegation of people bringing the money. The Apostle Paul says, "I am willing to participate. I'm willing to also go along."

So we see that collections are holy. Let me explain that a little bit more. The Lord Jesus explained that he was so close to his people that if you do something to his people and for his people, you do something for him. So that means if you help a child of the Lord out,

or a member out, you're also helping, you're also, in fact, doing something to Christ, to God. "And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me." So gathering money, having collections for the poor is also a collection for the Lord because the Lord has also a people among the poor.

The Lord Jesus recommended turning and also added promises to it. It was important enough for that. "But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil. Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful." So it's a reflection, it's an imitation. If someone is merciful and donates, it is an example of what Christ is doing, what God is doing. So the Lord has said, "Be merciful as I am merciful. Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful." So when you are considering how much to give to the church in Turkey, think of God, of his generosity, of his mercy, of his goodness and say, "Lord, when I think of thy mercy, when I think of thy goodness, I have to be merciful myself as well." And if you know something of Christ and of that gift of the Father, it makes you really generous, don't you think? If you are unconverted and there's no love for the Lord, there is no true faith, there is no real thankfulness, there is no real appreciation of the gift of God, then you're less motivated to donate money. Or maybe you do it in a different way, as if you can earn some salvation by that. But, no, it is meant to be an expression of thankfulness.

Have you heard of Tabitha in the Bible? What's her second name? Dorcas, right? "There was at Joppa a certain disciple named Tabitha, which by interpretation is called Dorcas: this woman was full of good works and almsdeeds which she did." She was a rich, affluent woman somehow and she was known to be very caring and she was full of good works, doing good things for others, unselfish, and she did almsdeeds for others. We need those people, collections for the poor and especially collections for the poor among God's people and the church. As we have, therefore, opportunity, let us do good unto all men especially unto them who are of the household of faith.

So we may have had times that we were close to the Lord, maybe you had better times before, maybe you have attended the Lord's Supper in the past, maybe you were so deeply impressed with God's gift and those days, those months that you were so close to the Lord you also were less connected to your money and more willing to donate. Now when spiritual life goes down and in times of darkness, there is less desire to give and therefore the Apostle Paul writes in 2 Thessalonians, "But ye, brethren, be not weary in well-doing." Don't be weary in well-doing. Keep doing the right thing.

Finally, think of this, Jerusalem is the mother church, they send missionaries to Asia Minor and they receive money from them, right? How would that feel today if we sent evangelists and missionaries to Bolivia and suppose Bolivia would be way richer than Canada and they would donate money to us? So we send ministers there and they send money back. That's how it was. So we have often the feeling, right, that missionary work is missionary work among the poor, in Third World countries, but why? Is that a leftover of Colonialism? In the Bible we read that also the rich, also the healthy ones, also the

smart ones, also the rich countries need missionaries, and I think it's not taking too long anymore that people from Africa come to Canada to preach the word and to be missionaries here. Why do we always send missionaries to poor countries? Why not to rich countries? You know, let's think about that because missionary work is missionary work among them unfamiliar with God, with Christ, with the Bible, and there is a great need in Canada and so many places where there is no truth, so many places where people are so far from God and we need missionaries also in our country. And in a way we are all missionary workers, right? Not only them that are officially called.

But let's go to the second thought: the schedule starting in verse 5, "Now I will come unto you, when I shall pass through Macedonia: for I do pass through Macedonia. And it may be that I will abide," I don't know yet, "yea, and winter with you, that ye may bring me on my journey whithersoever I go. For I will not see you now by the way; but I trust to tarry a while with you, if the Lord permit." So the Apostle Paul is conveying that his plans are to visit Corinth. At this time he is in Ephesus but he does not know yet, he's wondering if the Lord permits. So this is quite something for missionaries to know where the Lord sends them, right, and where they must preach the word.

"But I will tarry at Ephesus until Pentecost." And now something very interesting, verse 9, he says, "I will stay in Ephesus," in total that will be three years, and he gives a reason, a very interesting reason why he stays in Ephesus for so long. "For a great door and effectual is opened unto me, and there are many adversaries." What does that mean? I understand the first part better than the last part. So the Apostle Paul says, "I'll stay in Ephesus because the Lord is blessing my labor. The Lord is doing wonders. The Lord draws people out of the darkness. It is not in vain. I just feel the Lord is blessing my work because a great door and effectual is opened." There is an opportunity to speak to people. The Lord gives that opportunity so clearly and he sees it and it is an effectual and a great door. So he concludes from the blessings and he concludes from the providence of God that he has to be there.

In between brackets, I remember so well more than 25 years ago when I had the calling to come to Chilliwack and this text spoke to me, "For a great door and effectual is opened unto me." So the Lord showed me also in his providence. He opens doors and it's often in the spirit that you feel you have to go through the door. The door is opening, as if the door is beckoning, "Come this way. This way. This way." So that's how I experienced that.

What a wonder when the Lord is still working and a great door and effectual is opened unto me, but then the last part, "and there are many adversaries." So the Apostle Paul says, "I stay in Ephesus because, on the one hand, I see my work is blessed, on the other side, there are many adversaries, and I also have to stay for that." He doesn't say, "Well, there are many adversaries, I'd better go somewhere else. There's so much resistance and opposition, I'm leaving." He does not say, "I go to a congregation that they all love me and all appreciate me and all adore me." He doesn't say, "I go to a mission field where they are waiting for me and open the doors for me." No, also there are many adversaries. So in spite of the adversaries, the Lord yet can open doors. The Lord says, "There are

adversaries, there are problems. It won't be easy but yet I also open the doors and bless the labor."

That's what it is here, right? The Lord opens doors and so the Apostle Paul did not hear a voice from heaven where to go, but he concluded it and he felt it in his heart and the Lord spoke, 2 Corinthians 2:12, "Furthermore, when I came to Troas to preach Christ's gospel, and a door was opened unto me of the Lord, I had no rest in my spirit, because I found not Titus my brother: but taking my leave of them, I went from thence into Macedonia." So when the Lord is opening doors, also shows resistance, the Lord can give that no rest in the spirit. That's how I felt. I was in that time in the church in Holland, I had that calling from Chilliwack and I felt so much the need, the need of the congregation, the need of the young people. I had such an unrest in my spirit. I was standing in the pulpit in my previous congregation and I felt I couldn't stay there anymore, I had to leave because a door is opened in many different ways. I won't elaborate on that now. A door opened.

So that's what we see here, "For a great door and effectual is opened unto me," and realize that this means that the Lord is doing the work, that the Lord opens the hearts, that an extraordinary work is needed, that no minister can open the door himself. It brings us to the third thought: recommendations in love. Verse 10 through 20, "Now if Timotheus come, see that he may be with you without fear: for he worketh the work of the Lord, as I also do." In verses 10 through 20, it's remarkable he mentions seven names. He mentions Timotheus and Apollos, and Stephanas, and Fortunatus, and Achaicus, and Aquila, and Priscilla. The Apostle Paul writes also to them and is asking for support for them, asking the congregation to acknowledge them, to not despise them, to submit themselves. That was the word, to acknowledge, to submit, do not despise. So he's recommending those people, those true to the Lord to the congregation.

"Let no man despise them, conduct him forth in peace, that he may come unto me: for I look for him with the brethren. As touching our brother Apollos, I greatly desired him to come unto you." And then in between those verses he writes in verse 13, "Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong." Those are military terms, watching, be continually on your guard. It's in the context of those people the Lord is using in the congregations, he says, "Watch ye together with them, lest ye be surprised by your enemies. Stand fast. Stand fast in the faith. Keep in your ranks. Do not be disorderly. Be determined to keep your ranks unbroken. Keep close together. Acquit yourselves like men. When you're attacked, do not flinch. Maintain your ground. Resist. Press forward." So the Apostle Paul in that piece 10 through 20 or so is encouraging the congregation to be united and to work together, endeavoring to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace." He also has expressed that in Galatians 5, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith."

I have a question here: as a church in the Chilliwack congregation, are we a Sunday church? An only Sunday church? So Sunday you see each other and you nod and you say, "Good morning," and you greet each other and that's it? During the week there's no connection? Are we a Sunday church? We should be a 24/7 church, to always be connected and to have contact with each other and to care for one another. And that's

what I see here. I see all those names mentioned and the encouragement for them and to stand fast and to watch together. It's about a type of togetherness.

To salute the Lord, and it's quite interesting that the Apostle Paul often used the words "in the Lord." What do you think it means to "salute you much in the Lord, to greet you in the Lord"? It means in faith, in connection with the Lord. And I looked at that and I thought how often is that actually in the Bible, the expression "in the Lord"? So I typed it in with "in the Lord" and just pressed enter and you see a whole list in the concordance of all those "in the Lord" expressions. In the Lord, that's a standing expression in the Bible. Very interesting and very important because all we do we should do in the Lord, thinking of him, rely on him, for his cause. Not just doing it in our own strength, not doing things for our own interests but for him, in the Lord, in the Lord, to salute one in the Lord, to be together in the Lord.

So let me show that from the Bible. A number of texts I love to mention with "in the Lord," and when I quote those texts, wonder to yourself, think about it yourself if you ever do things in the Lord. To salute someone, to greet someone, even greeting someone in the Lord? So during the week you see each other, in church you see each other and you greet each other in the Lord. If you don't greet someone in the Lord, it's cold, right? In the Lord means I recognize you as a fellow member.

Acts 14:3, "Long time therefore abode they speaking boldly in the Lord, which gave testimony unto the word of his grace, and granted signs and wonders to be done by their hands." So boldly speaking in the Lord. That's part of the congregation to speak boldly in the Lord on the pulpit, at houses, at Catechism classes, but also you with one another at your home. To speak boldly in the Lord.

Or Romans 16, "That ye receive her in the Lord, as becometh saints, and that ye assist her in whatsoever business she hath need of you: for she hath been a succourer of many, and of myself also." You see, to receive people helping you in the Lord. "Greet Amplias my beloved in the Lord. Salute Tryphena and Tryphosa, who labour in the Lord. Salute the beloved Persis, which laboured much in the Lord. Salute Rufus chosen in the Lord, and his mother and mine. Tertius, who wrote this epistle, salute you in the Lord." He goes on and on and on in the Lord because everything we do in the congregation should be done in the Lord, in connection, in faith, in dependence upon him. Do you see that? It is so spiritual and that's how the Apostle Paul is ending 1 Corinthians, explained to the congregation that you need that time of unity, to do all things in him, for him, through him.

"For this cause have I sent unto you Timotheus, who is my beloved son, and faithful in the Lord." Faithful in the Lord. Labor in the Lord. Salute in the Lord. Testify in the Lord. "For he is called in the Lord being a servant as the Lord's freeman." So this call in the Lord.

"Am I not an apostle? am I not free? have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord? are not ye my work in the Lord?" Are you not my work in the Lord? "In whom all the building fitly

framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord. This I say therefore and testify in the Lord. Children, obey your parents in the Lord." Children, obey your parents in the Lord. All the children, young children, obey your parents. Why? Not because they are so perfect, not because they are so deserving it, but in the Lord and for the Lord's sake. So to obey them in the Lord.

"Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord," of course, "and of his might. Receive him therefore in the Lord. I beseech Euodias, and beseech Syntyche, that they be of the same mind in the Lord." Same mind in the Lord. "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands as it is fit in the Lord." For the Lord's sake.

So we've dealt with the collections and we've dealt with the second part of this chapter, the schedule where he was going, he was staying in Ephesus for three years, right? And we talked about the recommendations and now, finally, the special greetings. "All the brethren greet you. Greet ye one another with an holy kiss." It was their custom in those days that even men together kissed each other, not on the lips but on the cheek, as still happens so often in the Middle East. So a holy kiss, a God-fearing greeting.

So that can still be the case, a handshake can be a holy handshake. You know, when I come to the pulpit, the whole consistory shakes hands with me and that means something to just feel close to what the whole week is the holy handshake meaning we pray for you, we support you, we are behind you, we are together in those things, together with a holy kiss. So think about that.

"The salutation of me Paul with mine own hand." So the Apostle Paul had a clerk who was writing the epistle for him, he dictated it to him and said, "Write this down," but then at the end he said, "Now may I hold the pen?" And then he wrote with his own handwriting, in his own hand he wrote the last couple sentences.

So, "The salutation of me Paul with mine own hand." And then before he ends, he comes with that important statement just before he closes, "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema." Let him be accursed. "Maranatha," meaning the Lord Jesus come. And then he says, "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. My love be with you all in Christ Jesus."

So let us spend the last 15 minutes on that verse 22, "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ." We all know that faith is important, true saving faith, and what is true saving faith? It's the opposite of doing good works. It is by faith not by works, right? "Whosoever believeth in me will not perish but have everlasting life." Believing is him that worketh not but believeth in him that justifies the ungodly. So believing is having nothing, doing nothing, and relying completely on him, seeking salvation only in the other and totally relying on that Savior.

But now some people misinterpret that and they say believing is not feeling anything, just assuming. Just assume and you're saved. Just believe you are saved. Just tell yourself that you're saved. Just impress it upon your own heart and repeat it to yourself and say, "I'm

saved. I'm saved. I'm saved. I have the belief. I have the belief that I'm the Lord Jesus Christ's child, that he has given his blood for me. I have to believe that. I assume that." That's not believing it.

Believing is deeper than that and believing is believing in love, a faith working by love. If love is missing in something, it doesn't mean much. We know that the Apostle Paul wrote about that, right, in 1 Corinthians 1, that we are a tinkling cymbal if there is no love there, no charity. So we speak of justifying faith and not a justifying love, yet love is necessary not as a prerequisite, not as something you earn, it's not so that you must love the Lord first and then the Lord will save you. This love does not come from outside, but that love is yet a mark of grace. It's a mark. It's a characteristic of true faith. Imagine a faith without brokenness, without the light, without love. That faith cannot please God. Imagine an emotional faith, a hope, an expectation but without love for the Lord Jesus. That's not right. Or think of the impressions of God and Christ without loving him. It happens. It happens that people are in tears, be reading a text in the Bible, and believing you're saved and you have absolutely no idea of who the Lord Jesus is. They don't love him. You can't go to the Lord's Supper like that. You're not supposed to trust that you're saved then because if any man, it does not matter who you are and what you have, if any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema, let him be accursed. What I read here is that love for the Lord Jesus Christ in particular is essential for salvation. Without that love for him, your faith is nothing. [unintelligible] There might be a joy but no depth. Remember that parable of the seed falling into a thin layer of topsoil and they received the word immediately with joy and no depth. No love there.

Now not all of God's children have a close walk with the Lord but all know something of that love. The Lord Jesus Christ has revealed himself to them and they've seen him and adored him and treasured him and looked up to him and delighted in him. They know of that highly esteeming of Jesus because that love includes desiring him, hungering after Christ and adoring him. Have you ever seen him? Have you ever loved him?

The sheep hear the voice of the Shepherd and follow him. That's a mark of grace to follow the Shepherd. Do you know that love? Do we love his voice, love the born Savior, love him as the prophet, as the king, as the high priest maybe? Could you tell what it is in Jesus that appeals to you? So why you say that you love the Lord Jesus, what is it for if he is unfamiliar to you? You're not so close to him, if you have no relationship with him? Don't fool yourself.

"If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema." So you do not only need God to speak to your heart, you need faith with love in the second person, in the Lord Jesus Christ, and he needs to be precious to you.

"Let him be Anathema." Let him be. So the Lord says, "I agree with that." And the Lord Jesus says, "I agree with that." And the Apostle Paul says, "Yes, let them be Anathema." Why such a bold statement, Anathema? Well, that is because the Apostle Paul loves, he loves the people and that's why he's so honest, that's why he's talking about hell, that's why he's talking about this perdition. He wants to warn the people and says, "At the end

of my letter, I still have the feeling I have to make clear that if you don't love the Lord Jesus, that you are accursed. Oh, please don't deceive yourselves? Oh, please think this through for yourself, bring this up to the Lord! Do you love him because it is possible that you have believed for a long time that you're a child of the Lord and maybe you're not."

"Let him be Anathema," let him be accursed. What we know is that when everything is for you, that means the circumstances are okay, people love you and you feel right about things, and you feel blessed in many ways, but if you don't have that faith and that love, you have nothing. And the other way around, if you may have this Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior, whatever happens nothing can separate you from that love of Christ.

Anathema, that's an Aramaic word, gives a very deep meaning. It is final. Anathema, it's over. So the Lord Jesus Christ himself experienced that, right? He himself felt accursed. He himself was on the cross and we hear his voice, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" He was accursed himself, felt accursed, at least, from his Father, and therefore through that he can save people and he will save people so that they are not Anathema but blessed and welcome in heaven.

So congregation, we have the privilege of preaching unto you the Lord Jesus Christ and him crucified. The Lord Jesus Christ and him cursed. "Cursed is he that hangeth on a tree." He was the cursed one. Because of his curse there is salvation but please don't deceive yourself, if any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord, the Kurios, the king, the possessor, the ruler, Jesus, meaning his personal name, he will save his people from their sins and Christ, the anointed one, the priest and king and prophet. If you don't love him, if you have no relationship with him, repent ye, repent ye. If you have deceived yourself, there's still time to seek the Lord. It's not too late yet and today he is speaking to you. "You will be accursed if you don't love me."

"The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you," he says. So can you miss him? God's people love him and yet so often it happens to God's people that the Lord is knocking on the door and that they don't come quickly to open it, and then finally they get out of bed and they open the door and he's gone. You remember that, right, from the Song of Solomon, and then she's going through the streets and she wants to find him who loveth her soul, and she finally finds him. And so God's people can also according to their own feeling lose the Savior again and not exercise their faith and be so slow and so lacking, and still they love the Lord because when the Lord leaves, they are seeking him again. So sometimes the Lord knocks on the door again and just leaves, kind of, to let his people seek again and feel that urgency again.

So people of God, seek to become more familiar with him. He is ever faithful. He will not forsake the work of his own hands. He experienced hellish agonies to save sinners. But with no love for the Lord Jesus, he is not yours. So Maranatha, come Lord Jesus. Lord Jesus, come again. The Apostle Paul at the end of his letter says, "You know, congregation, you talk about many things but," he said, "love one another and you're accursed if you don't love him, but the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you, and

my love be with you all in Christ Jesus." A love in Christ Jesus, so he's not saying, "I love you," he says, "I love you in him, in connection with him because you belong to the living church."

Maranatha. His tone, his melody is very serious, very loving but very serious but it's one or the other, always blessed or always perishing. Amen.