

1 Corinthians 16:14-24 “How to Love God’s People”

Intro. One of the greatest needs that we all have is to be loved. When we love, and when we are loved by others, we tend to be healthy psychologically, and it even promotes physical health. But when a person feels unloved, it leads to all sorts of problems emotionally and physically. So it should come as no surprise that the two greatest commandments in all of the Bible is to love God, and to love your neighbor (Mk. 12:30-31). Likewise, Paul commands believers in v.14, “Let all that you do be done with love.”¹ He exemplifies love in his own life as he expresses his own love for the Corinthians in v.24.

But how do we *show* love? After all, if love is just a feeling *we* have, that will do very little good for others. No, feelings of love will benefit someone else only when those feelings prompt us to show love in specific ways. So this morning we are going to look to our text, and see how Paul gives some valuable insight into how to show love within a fellowship of believers. Love must not just be words or feelings, but it must be expressed in specific ways. And when you show love to others, you will usually find that love comes right back to you.

So I want to share with you 6 ways that we can show love to one another. First, you should:

I. SERVE ONE ANOTHER

In v.15 we read that the household of Stephanas “devoted themselves to the ministry of the saints.” “Ministry” is *diakonia* in Greek. We get our word “deacon” from that word. It simply refers to service of most any kind. Here in this text Paul has in mind the kind of service that meets the needs of someone else. We should be sensitive to the needs of others and do what we can to meet those needs. When you show love by serving someone, you are saying, “What can I do to help you?” Jesus said, “the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister...” He was the greatest example of showing love by means of service. He healed the sick, fed the hungry, and even washed the feet of the disciples.

Now there are two main truths about ministry that I want you to see from our text:

A. Service Should Begin with the Saints – Notice that they “devoted themselves to the ministry *of the saints*.” Love and service should begin at home. Gal. 6:10 says, “Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.” Heb. 6:10 says, “For God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints, and do minister.” Of course, we should show love to all people with our service, but we must not neglect ministry to our own fellow believers.

B. Take the Initiative for Such Service - Notice that they “devoted themselves” to such ministry. The Gk. word [*tasso*] means that they “appointed” themselves to this ministry. They

¹ This is a present imperative in Greek. It is literally, “All things of you in love become” (preserving word order).

didn't wait until someone asked for help, or until some ministry was formed. They just took the initiative to serve others whenever they noticed a need. They volunteered to serve. They served entirely on their own initiative with an eye only to the benefit resulting for others. They saw a need, and then met the need through service.

Now it is perfectly appropriate for a church to assign ministries and responsibilities to its members, but Stephanas and his family did not wait to be appointed or asked. They spontaneously assigned themselves to help meet any need they saw among the saints. I believe that that is the way it should be if God's Spirit is really working in a church. In a Spirit-filled church, any time a need arises, someone will step forward to meet that need, regardless of whether or not they hold a formal office.

Ministries in a church often start out this way. People see a need, and they work to meet that need. If the need is too great for them to handle, they pray and ask for other workers to join them in meeting the need. That's how the deacon ministry started in Acts 6.

Do you see needs in our church, or in our community that are not being met? Are you taking any initiative to meet those needs? Or are you the type that says, "Why doesn't someone do something about that?" We should be ready and willing to minister to the physical needs, social needs, and spiritual needs of people. That includes visiting and praying for the sick, or taking food for the family. It includes helping someone who has a financial need. Another example is found in v.16. Paul speaks of "everyone who works ... with us." literally means "to work together with", which often involves helping someone else in some task. Sometimes people just need a helping hand! If you see someone working alone that needs a helping hand, offer to help!

A man fell into a pit and could not get out. A Pharisee said, "Only bad people fall into a pit" and walked on by. A news reporter wanted the exclusive story on his experience. So he pulled out his camera, took pictures, pulled out his note pad and asked questions. A self-pitying person said, "You haven't seen anything until you've seen my pit!" An optimist said, "things could be worse." A pessimist said, "things will get worse." But all of them did nothing to help the poor fellow. But Jesus seeing the man, took him by the hand and lifted him out of the pit.² What would you do in that situation? May we all show love by lending a hand when we see a need.

Another way that we show our love is this:

II. BE SUBMISSIVE

In v.16 Paul exhorted the Corinthian church, "that you also submit to such, and to everyone who works and labors with us."³ To submit to someone else is one expression of love. It also reduces conflict in a relationship.

Notice the kind of people we especially should submit to in the church. Paul plainly says that we should submit to such men as Stephanas "and to everyone who works and labors with us." Jesus said, "Whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant...; just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many" (Mt. 20:26-28). Stephanas sought to serve, not rule, but it is to such servant-leaders (Lk. 22:26) that

² *Pulpit Helps Illustration Collection II.*

³ There is surely a play on words here. "Devoted themselves" is *tasso* in Gk., and "submit" is from *hupotasso*. The first verb means to put oneself in line to do something, and the other is a military term. It means to get in line under the orders of someone.

we should submit. So the kind of authority Paul endorses is authority that is earned through humble service, not imposed merely by holding an office. We submit to such people by respecting them, and by heeding their counsel, advice, leadership, and admonition.

Submission to authority is a key evidence of the Spirit-filled life. After commanding us to be filled with the Spirit in Eph. 5:18, Paul listed one result in Eph. 5:21, “submitting to one another in the fear of God.” As we learn to submit to God, we will have little difficulty submitting to any authority that God places over us, be it in the government, the church, or the home. Lack of submission to such authority is a sign of rebellion against God.

So one of the ways we show our love to someone is by submitting to them. A child demonstrates love for his parents by submitting. A wife demonstrates love for her husband by submitting to his leadership. And church members demonstrate love and appreciation to the leaders of a church by submitting to them.

Another way that we show our love is this:

III. BE A COMPANION

If you want to show your love for someone, go to them and spend time with them. Paul said in vv.17-18a, “I am glad about the coming of Stephanas, Fortunatus,⁴ and Achaicus, for what was lacking on your part they supplied. For they refreshed my spirit and yours.” Paul was grateful that his three friends had come from Corinth to Ephesus to spend some time with him. That was no small journey, probably across the Aegean Sea. They genuinely befriended Paul, by being with him, by encouraging him, and by identifying with His ministry. They talked with Paul and no doubt discussed the Lord’s work in Corinth. Perhaps they were the ones who delivered the Corinthian letter to Paul (1 Cor. 7:1). And so the main ingredient of companionship is togetherness; it cannot be experienced from a distance or secondhand.

Notice one of the main outcomes of such companionship is stated in v.18, “For they refreshed [*anapauso*] my spirit...” One of the finest compliments that can be paid is for our Christian friends to say that we are refreshing to be around. Paul’s friends helped the hard-pressed apostle find refreshment. Your presence is especially needed when someone is going through a difficult time. In 2 Cor. 7:6 Paul said, “God, who comforts the depressed, comforted us by the coming of Titus.” Companionship also helps in preventing us from falling into sin or from losing heart. One of the surest ways we can get into spiritual trouble is by neglecting fellowship with other believers.

In your own life, think of someone who really needs your presence? Do you have a grandparent, or parent, or someone else who is lonely, and who needs to be visited? Can you say you love them if you neglect to visit them, and spend time with them? James 1:27 says, “Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble...” Jesus said in Matthew 25:36, “...I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me...” I believe we should set some goals for spending time with those we love. We have very few that participate in our visitation program on Tuesdays. But I know that at least some are visiting our homebound, sick and others on their own at other times. Do you ever express your love by making such visits?

Another way that we show our love is this:

⁴ Fortunatus was a Hellenistic name often adopted by a freed slave (Meaning “fortunate”) – Blomberg.

IV. SHOW HOSPITALITY

Hospitality does not seem to be practiced as much today as in the past. People are so busy, and housekeeping and having people over seems to be less common. But it was practiced on a regular basis in the early church as one way of showing love and ministering to the saints.

One of the greatest examples of showing hospitality was a special couple by the name of Aquila and Priscilla. Paul says in the last of v.19, “Aquila and Priscilla greet you heartily in the Lord, with the church that is in their house.” We know from Acts 18 that when Paul first came to Corinth, Aquila and Priscilla opened their home to him. They were hospitable then. And several years later we find that they had moved to Ephesus, where they opened their home for the church to use as a meeting place. The early church often met in homes that were large enough to accommodate a fairly large group.⁵ They would gather for prayer, fellowship, and for instruction.

Hospitality was also commonly practiced for Christians who traveled. When Christians traveled from place to place in New Testament times, they could expect, almost without exception, to be entertained with great care and love by fellow Christians. Just this past Wednesday night I share how Gaius opened his home for traveling missionaries and preachers (3 John 5-8). Every Christian home today should be an open and loving haven for those who need hospitality.

One ministry that Cheryl and I can fondly remember from our days as youth was the ministry of members opening their homes to the youth group. One of the youth leaders in particular would frequently have the youth group over to his house. We had some great times of Bible study and fellowship there. At other times we would meet in different homes after church on Sunday evening. That was a great ministry to the younger saints of God.

Have you practiced hospitality to other saints of God? Have you ever invited a new member over to fellowship over a meal? Would you be willing to open your home so we can expand our home groups?

Hospitality doesn't have to be practiced in your home. We need a S.S. class to offer to host our next welcome fellowship in the Social Hall. Will your class volunteer? It would be great if a couple of families would offer to host a fellowship in the social hall after church on Sunday night.

Another way that we show our love is this:

V. EXPRESS AFFECTIONATE GREETINGS

In v.20 Paul says, “All the brethren greet you. Greet one another with a holy kiss.” One mark of love in the early church was the way they lovingly greeted each other. We human beings need physical contact and gestures of affection. So here in our text Paul even commands Christians to greet one another in a loving way. The Greek word translated “greet” literally meant “to draw to one's self” or “to embrace” (Acts 20:1; Heb 11:13). In New Testament times they would embrace and kiss one another on the cheek. (See also Rom. 16:16; 2 Cor. 13:12; I Th. 5:26; I Pet. 5:14). That kind of greeting was very common and acceptable in that eastern culture. Even today in some parts of eastern Europe and the Middle East, even men greet one another with a kiss on the cheek as a sign of love and affection.

⁵ These smaller groups would meet together on a large scale from time to time (11:18, 20; 14:23), where we do not know, but perhaps in the open air.

I do not believe that we *must* obey this command exactly the same way. Each culture will greet differently. In western culture a handshake is a more common form of greeting, and then a warm hug is common among family and close friends. These days men may greet with a fist bump! A church is a spiritual family, and we should experience warmth and affection among brothers and sisters in Christ. That is why Rom. 12:10 says, “Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love....”

The more difficult application of this principle of love has to do with cross-gender greetings. Paul does say “Greet one another,” and the command seems pretty inclusive. And one may wonder why he would need to add the modifier “holy” if the kiss on the cheek never crossed to the opposite gender. 1 Timothy 5:2 gives us the bottom line. There Paul says we should treat “older women as mothers, younger as sisters, with all purity.”

So if we lived in an ideal world and church environment, we would freely greet one another with a warm handshake or hug, even with the opposite gender. I would greet my mom, sister and niece with hugs, as well as my granddaughters. A church family is to have a family atmosphere of love. However, we live in the day of the “Me, too” movement, lawsuits, and so forth. So we have to follow some guidelines: 1) Don’t initiate affection such as hugs to someone unless you are confident it will be welcomed by the other person. Respect the other person’s personal space. You can usually tell from a person’s body language and demeanor whether they would welcome something beyond a handshake. 2) Make sure your greeting is holy, free from lust and is completely non-sexual. In other words, the kind of hug spouses give to each other is not appropriate.

By the way, there are other reasons the word “holy” is added as a modifier. When the kiss of affection is given it should also not be manipulative or hypocritical, pretending to express affection that is not really there, like the kiss of Judas (Rom. 12:9). It should be a holy kiss.

I believe we need to be careful that everyone within our church is greeted with some sign of affection. Don’t exclude anyone. Paul said, “Greet one another” not “greet your close friends.” Our visitors should be greeted warmly. When we come to God’s house, we ought to become acquainted with people we don’t know. Let it be known that Swift Creek Baptist Church has this mark of love. The church ought to be the friendliest place in the community. Furthermore, if there is someone you cannot greet, then there is sin in your life.

We should certainly apply this principle of love to our own earthly families. Husbands and wives should certainly be affectionate with each other. Yet 56% of women say their pets are more affectionate than their partners.⁶ Fathers, you should hug your daughter. Children you should hug and kiss your parents *and grandparents!* I remember a time when I was a teenager that I didn’t want to be seen hugging my own mother. Young people, you’re never too old to hug your mother!

By the way, another reason we should obey this command is due to the benefit we and others receive. Hugging is the cheapest medicine available to us today. It relieves many physical and emotional problems. It reduces stress. Stress is one of the main contributors to illness. Furthermore, researchers discovered that when a person is touched, the amount of hemoglobin in their blood increases significantly. And babies who are given all the nutrition they need but receive no physical contact grow less, cry more, and come down with all types of illness and disease. So you really should be giving and receiving hugs!⁷

⁶ BizRate Research in *Readers Digest*, Sept. 2005, p. 223.

⁷ Kevin Trudeau, *Natural Cures “They” Don’t Want You to Know About* (Elk Grove Village, IL: Alliance Publishing Group, 2004), 169. Also, Helen Colton, *The Joy of Touching*.

Finally, yet another way that we show our love is this:

VI. GIVE VERBAL EXPRESSIONS OF LOVE

I said at the beginning of my message that our love should not be *only* words, but it should not exclude words either. We do show love by our words. That reminds me of the old story of a wife who was frustrated by the fact that her husband never would tell his wife that he loved her. But he explained it by saying, “Honey, I told you when I married you that I loved you. If I ever change my mind, you will be the first to know.” Well, that is not good enough. That man needed to show his love to his wife by more frequent words of love!

Now there are several ways we show love by our words.

A. Words of Appreciation - Paul says in the last of v.18, “Therefore acknowledge such men.” “Acknowledge” [*epiginosko*] signifies recognition of someone for something they have done and expressing appreciation. Paul is not commanding us to give out plaques all the time. He is simply calling for respect and appreciation, which sometimes will be public and sometime private. Proper appreciation of deserving persons in the church not only is not wrong but is pleasing to the Lord. 1 Th. 5:12-13a says, “And we urge you, brethren, to recognize those who labor among you, and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love for their work’s sake.”

Epaphroditus was the sort of godly person to be imitated and acknowledged. Paul said, “Therefore receive him in the Lord with all joy and hold men like him in high regard” (Phil. 2:29).

Application: Family members should show appreciation for one another. Children should show appreciation to their parents. Husbands and wives should show appreciation to one another. And parents should even show appreciation to their children for some of the things they do as well! And here in the family of God, when you see someone working hard for the Lord, you ought to express appreciation to them.

B. Words of Rebuke and Warning – Many times in 1 Corinthians Paul rebuked the Corinthians for their sinful actions and attitudes, especially in chapters 1-6. But love compelled him to do so. Jesus said in Rev. 3:19, “As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten....” Love meets needs, and sometimes we need rebuke, though we must rebuke the right way.

Also, rebuke and correction is often followed by warning. Paul said in v.22, “If anyone does not love⁸ the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be accursed.” What a strong warning! Some of the Corinthians were living in such a way that Paul could wonder if they really loved Jesus. He wondered if they were even saved. Some people’s love for Jesus is all talk and no substance. He wanted to make sure they loved Jesus, for only those who love Jesus will love His saints. And so Paul warns them that if they don’t love Jesus, they will be “Anathema”, which is a Greek word meaning, “Devoted to destruction.” In other words, a lack of love for the Lord demonstrates that they are not true believers. He thus warns all unbelievers of the eternal destruction that await them. Every unbeliever should heed such a warning.

And then notice that Anathema is followed by Maranatha, which means, “Our Lord, come.” The second coming of Christ is the hope and longing of the Christian, and the woe to everyone who does not love the Lord. That’s because Christ’s coming will bring salvation to the

⁸ Note *phileo* here. See Lenski, p.786.

saved and damnation to the lost. The unloving heart is always ill at ease in the presence of Him whom it does not love. What woe! In love Paul warns people to trust in Christ before it is eternally too late.

Finally, another verbal expression of love we should give is:

C. Words of Assurances of Love - Even though Paul had rebuked them in this letter, he closes with an assurance of his love for them by some tender words. He says in v.24, "My love be with you all in Christ Jesus." In no other letter does he end with this kind of statement of his love, but it was profoundly needed for the Corinthians. Paul had been stern with the Corinthians believers, so he closed his letter by assuring them of his love. Paul gives a great example of that as he concludes his letter.

Parents, when you must discipline your children, be sure that assurances of love follow your discipline. And husbands in particular need to express *words* of love for our wives. The greatest sin in the universe is one-sided or unexpressed love.

The great writer Thomas Carlyle had a wife who loved and almost worshiped him, and yet he hardly made any time for her. He was so involved in his work that he barely even acknowledged her love and expressions of gratitude. She did little things for him and really loved herself to death. After she died, Carlyle was depressed and began to thumb through her diary. There he read, "I heard his footsteps today, and it thrilled my heart that I could see him for a few moments again" and "I did his shirt for him today and it was the joy of my life to do something for my beloved." Page after page contained expressions of her love. Finally, Carlyle threw the diary down and ran to the graveyard. He fell across her grave and with tears streaming down his face cried out, "Darling, if I had only known." [Vines, p.271-72]. Well, he should have known, and he should have expressed his love for his wife much more often. Oh, don't wait until your loved one dies before you express your love for them!

Conclusion: So Christian, are you obeying the greatest commandment, the commandment to love. Well, let's review the various ways we should show love, and see how many of these you do. Do you serve others? Do you have a submissive attitude? Do you spend time with people? Do you show hospitality, inviting people to your home? Do you greet people warmly? And finally, do you express your love with words? If you are lacking in any of these expressions of love, I want to call upon you to make a commitment to start or renew such practices of love.

I close by restating the warning of the apostle Paul in v.22, "If anyone does not love the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be accursed." Do you love Jesus? When you get married, you publicly affirm your love for that other person. If you haven't done so, I am going to ask you to show your love for Jesus Christ by a public commitment to Him. A confession of faith and baptism is the first step. If you have accepted Christ, or want to accept Christ as Savior, then I ask you to step out during the invitation song.

Sources: Craig Blomberg, *The NIV Application Commentary: 1 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994); R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's First and Second Epistles to the Corinthians* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1937); John F. MacArthur, Jr., *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: 1 Corinthians* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1984); Alexander Maclaren, *Expositions of Holy Scripture*, Vol. 14 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977 reprint); J. Vernon McGee, *Thru The Bible*, Vol. 5 (Pasadena: Thru The Bible Radio, 1983); Paige Patterson, *The Troubled Triumphant Church: an Exposition of First Corinthians* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1983); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [Ver. 5:30] (Ontario: onlinebible.net, 2017); Jerry Vines, *God Speaks Today: A Study of 1 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979); Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Wise: 1 Corinthians* (Wheaton:

Victor Books, 1983). Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

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