

The Sacrifice

Memorial Day: Originated after the Civil War & was known as “Decoration Day.”

To remember & honor those who died fighting for our country.

- Their service, their sacrifice is to be honored
 - Our prayer is it was not in vain.

Paul is going to be talking about Sacrifice as well & honoring those who serve in God’s Kingdom.

Brothers, you know the household of Stephanas: They are the firstfruits of Achaia and have devoted themselves to serving the saints. I urge you ¹⁶ also to submit to such people, and to everyone who works and labors with them. ¹⁷ I am pleased to have Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus present, because these men have made up for your absence. ¹⁸ For they have refreshed my spirit and yours. Therefore recognize such people.

The churches of Asia greet you. Aquila and Priscilla greet you warmly in the Lord, along with the church that meets in their home. ²⁰ All the brothers greet you. Greet one another with a holy kiss.

²¹ This greeting is in my own hand—Paul. ²² If anyone does not love the Lord, a curse be on him. *Marana tha* that is, Lord, come! ²³ The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you. ²⁴ My love be with all of you in Christ Jesus. 1 Corinthians 16:15-24

Background:

In a city, a church, that was corrupt & rotten we find some very sweet closing words.

- They were suing one another.
- Excluding people (some would be full & drunk, others still hungry)
- Some were lording their spiritual freedoms over others & belittling them.
- It was a MESS. There was little love being expressed.

So when Paul had some Godly men, and women, whom were exuding Christ like love, humility, & actions....Paul wanted to honor them, to set them as an example, and to remind the church in Corinth & the church here in El Dorado.

Love one Another.

7 Signs of Brotherly Love...

- Evangelism (15a)
 - *Brothers, you know the household of Stephanas: They are the firstfruits of Achaia* v. 15a
 - 80% of all Christians believe they should be sharing their faith but only 61% have shared their faith within the last 6 months
 - I was helping a man put up chairs at our school & we began to talk...
 - Love one another by sharing the Gospel with them!

- Service to each other (15b)
 - *Brothers, you know the household of Stephanas: They are the firstfruits of Achaia and have devoted themselves to serving the saints* v. 15b
 - When they saw a need, they didn't wait for someone to tell them to "do it." They just did. They served.
 - Example of Laura & Michelle loving on the lady in the ER.
 - Love one another by serving them.

- Submission (16)
 - I urge you ¹⁶ also to submit to such people, and to everyone who works and labors with them. V. 16
 - Submission is not a 4 letter word.
 - The first leaders in Church office's were not men with Seminary degrees but rather those who loved God &

loved others. And by showing their love to the Lord & to each other they lived lives of integrity, shared the Gospel, selflessly served others.

- Consequently the church respected their service & spiritual authority that came out of that.
 - Love one another by submitting to them.
- Companionship (17-18a)
 - *I am pleased to have Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus present, because these men have made up for your absence.* ¹⁸ For they have refreshed my spirit and yours. V. 17-18a
 - In ministry there is such a thing as a Ministry of Presence.
 - Job's friends did it for 7 days when he was suffering. They just were there with him & didn't say a word for 7 days. Then they opened their mouth & it went down hill from there. They were rude & harsh to their friend.
 - If you don't know what to say...don't say anything! Just pray & BE PRESENT.
 - But look also who these men were an encouragement too...The Apostle Paul!
 - Sometimes we think that ministers, Pastors, Sunday school teachers, Deacons, are only here to serve & encourage us.
 - Let Jeff, Amber, & Amanda know they are doing a good job with Youth
 - Drop Nikki a note saying you appreciate her work for our kids, or the other nursery & children's church workers.
 - I was encouraged to find a little note the other day on my desk just telling me THANK YOU.
 - It would be nice to hear from some people when they DON'T need something...
 - Friends we ALL need encouragement. We all need prayed for.

- Everyone needs companionship. Everyone needs their spirit “refreshed.”
 - Love one another by being a friend, by being a companion.
 - Respect for Faithful Workers (18b)
 - *For they have refreshed my spirit and yours. Therefore recognize such people.* V. 18b
 - Those who are called to Ministry should be respected. Very similar to v. 16 on Submission.
 - Those of us in Ministry, we are driven by it.
 - I love it. I love the church. I love thinking about what the church could be. I love thinking about how we can more Christ-like & areas where we can grow in our faith & obedience.
 - I put a LOT of time into thinking about the big picture.
 - I was in a Deacon’s meeting last week & as I began to talk about our new service we will be starting in SEPTEMBER, Larry said... “What can we do to help?”
 - I about cried. That meant the world to me.
 - This isn’t just pointed at Pastors. All those in service to the Saints. Show them respect.
 - Love one another by showing Respect to faithful workers.
- Hospitality (19-20a)
 - *The churches of Asia greet you. Aquila and Priscilla greet you warmly in the Lord, along with the church that meets in their home. ²⁰ All the brothers greet you.* V. 19-20a
 - Before the church had large buildings, such as this, they met in people’s homes that had space.
 - That was no easy task I am sure but Aquila & Priscilla did it faithfully.

- When was the last time you invited someone over to your home? Look for a Guest or Church member you don't know & reach out to them.
- Many of you showed hospitality when the Todd Becker Foundation came back in April. You hosted & fed some of them in your home.
- Love one another by showing hospitality.
- Affection (20b)
 - *All the brothers greet you. Greet one another with a holy kiss. V.20*
 - Culturally the men would greet the men & the women would greet the women with a kiss on the cheek.
 - They were not afraid to show their love for one another.
 - In Africa men would hold hands with men as they were walking to show that this was their friend.
 - Nothing sexual about it.
 - Gave Jim a hug after seeing him.
 - Let them know that you love them.
 - Love one another by showing affection.

Love one another.

Stephanas and his household (vv. 15–18). These were the first people to be won to Christ in Achaia, and Paul had baptized them himself, instead of leaving it to one of his helpers (1 Cor. 1:16). They became important leaders in the church, for they “devoted themselves” to Christ’s service. The verb means “they appointed themselves,” but it does not suggest that they pushed their way into leadership. Rather, whenever they saw a need, they went to work to meet it without waiting to be asked. They were Paul’s helpers, and they labored (“toiled to the point of exhaustion”) for the Lord. What a wonderful thing it is when an entire family serves the Lord faithfully in the local church.

Stephanas was joined by Fortunatus and Achaicus as an official committee sent from Corinth to Ephesus to confer with Paul about church problems. Paul saw in them a representation of the entire church; their love to Paul compensated for Paul’s absence from Corinth. But these men did more than share problems with Paul; they also refreshed his spirit and brought him blessing.

This is a good place to encourage church members to refresh and encourage their pastor. Too often, believers share only problems and burdens with their spiritual leaders, and rarely share the blessings. Who is the pastor’s pastor? To whom does the pastor turn for spiritual refreshment and encouragement? Every church member, if he will, can help refresh the pastor and make his burdens lighter.

Paul encouraged the church to honor this very special family and submit to their spiritual leadership. It is right to honor faithful Christians if God gets the glory.

Aquila and Priscilla (vv. 19–20). These two were a dedicated husband-and-wife team whose lives and ministries intersected and intertwined with Paul’s. The apostle met them at Corinth because, like Paul, they were tentmakers (Acts 18:1–3). This godly couple had been expelled from Rome because Aquila was a Jew; but that was only part of God’s providence to get them to Corinth where they could assist Paul.

Priscilla must have been a remarkable woman. This couple’s names occur in the New Testament six times, and in four of these instances, Priscilla’s name stands first. (The best texts put Priscilla first in Acts 18:26.) We get the impression that she was the stronger of the two, a devoted leader and witness. They worked together in serving the Lord and helping Paul.

When Paul moved from Corinth to Ephesus, Aquila and Priscilla packed up and moved their business with him and assisted in founding the church in that needy city (Acts 18:18ff). So capable were they that Paul left them to oversee the ministry while he returned to Antioch. It was while they were at Ephesus that they assisted Apollos in better understanding the truth of the Gospel.

Every local church can be thankful for husbands and wives like Aquila and Priscilla, people who work together in serving the Lord and helping the preacher. The fact that his wife was a better leader did not hinder Aquila from standing with her in their united ministry. (I am sure that Priscilla submitted to her husband and did not try to act important.) One of the Ephesian assemblies met in their house, which shows they were people given to hospitality. Romans 16:4 states that, at one time, this dedicated couple risked their own lives to help save Paul. (See Acts 19:29–30; 20:19 for possible situations where this rescue might have occurred.)

But Priscilla and Aquila did not remain in Ephesus; for when Paul wrote to the saints at Rome, he greeted this couple there (Rom. 16:3). Once again, they had a church meeting in their house (Rom. 16:5). In my itinerant ministry, I have more than once preached to an assembly that had been founded in somebody’s living room.

In Paul's last letter, he sent greetings to Prisca (alternate spelling) and Aquila by way of Timothy, who was then overseeing the work in Ephesus (2 Tim. 4:19). This remarkable couple had left Rome and were now back in Ephesus, this time to assist Timothy as they had assisted Paul.

How many couples today would move as often as did Priscilla and Aquila, just to be able to serve the Lord better? And whenever they moved, they had to move their business as well. People with this kind of dedication and sacrifice are not easy to find, but they are great assets to the local church.

Paul's closing words need not detain us. The "holy kiss" (1 Cor. 16:20) was a common mode of greeting, the men kissing the men and the women kissing the women (Rom. 16:16; 2 Cor. 13:12; 1 Thes. 5:26; 1 Peter 5:14). If Paul were writing to Western churches, he would say, "Shake hands with one another."

Paul usually dictated his letters and then took the pen and added his signature. He also added his "benediction of grace" as a mark that the letter was authentic (see Gal. 6:11; 2 Thes. 3:17).

The word *anathema* is Aramaic and means "accursed" (see 1 Cor. 12:3). Not to love Christ means not to believe in Him, and unbelievers are accursed (John 3:16–21). The word *maranatha* is Greek and means "our Lord comes" or (as a prayer) "our Lord, come!" (see Rev. 22:20) If a person loves Jesus Christ, he will also love His appearing (2 Tim. 4:8).

Paul had been stern with the Corinthian believers, but he closed his letter by assuring them of his love. After all, "Faithful are the wounds of a friend" (Prov. 27:6).

Paul has shared a great deal of spiritual wisdom with us. May we receive it with meekness and put it into practice to the glory of God!¹

A church which has resources but also responsibilities

We have already seen Paul's insistence on the Corinthians' responsibility to share their financial resources. We have also noted the way Aquila and Prisca made their home available to the fellowship of believers. The most penetrating comment on such responsible sharing of resources comes with Paul's description of 'the household of Stephanas' (15–16): *they have devoted themselves to the service of the saints; I urge you to be subject to such men and to every fellow worker and labourer.*

Barrett sees these apparently innocuous phrases as the beginning of what we now know as the Christian ministry.¹¹ Stephanas' extended family (the contemporary meaning of the word *household*, *i.e.* relatives and retainers included) had seen the priority in the Christian community of simply being available, with the gift of hospitality, to wait on the needs of *the saints*. So they *devoted themselves* (the word speaks of a dedicated and disciplined lifestyle) to serving others. **As these folk began to meet the needs of their fellow-Christians, people began to recognize in them the marks of true Christian leadership. Paul felt able to urge the Corinthians *to be subject* to such people, *i.e.* to respect their leadership gifts.**

¹ Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). [*The Bible exposition commentary*](#) (Vol. 1, pp. 624–625). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

This insight challenges our notions, but particularly our practice, of leadership. We tend to give leadership to those who have received one particular kind of education, who have a measure of articulacy and general ability to think and speak on their feet, who measure up to worldly criteria of leadership. Do we ever take with proper seriousness the perspective Paul provides on leadership as service? Jesus taught the same truth: ‘Whoever would be great among you must be your servant.’ This indicates that the authentic, solid leadership of a local church will come from people who give themselves to serving the saints. Such leadership does not depend on education, qualifications, degrees, or natural charisma. It comes from the grace of God equipping his people with gifts which enable them to be servants of others in the fellowship of believers.¹³ The whole household of Stephanas lived like that: as a family they served others—adults, teenagers and children; master of the house and domestic servants; the elderly and the very young. Indeed, Barrett’s conclusion that ‘since the household of Stephanas have taken upon themselves the service of the saints, they must be adults’¹⁴ must be rejected. Children are very good at serving others; they often relish the opportunity and seize it without being solicited. One of the most effective testimonies to the reality of the risen Christ is the servant-lifestyle of a Christian family.

Such resources for Christian ministry are present in every local church. Every home, every person is a resource and therefore constitutes a responsibility for those resources to be used for the glory of God. This chapter speaks of the body’s responsibility to minister to its ministers, as well as the ministers’ responsibility to the body. Both are vital, if the church of God is to grow up to maturity.

Such growth is always close to Paul’s heart, and his instructions to the Corinthians in verses 13–14 summarize the responsibility incumbent upon every Christian: *Be watchful, stand firm in your faith, be courageous, be strong. Let all that you do be done in love.* In the course of this letter he has pinpointed many areas of discipleship where they have either fallen asleep, or started to totter, or lost their nerve. He has challenged them to take firm action to put right what has gone wrong. Above all, he has stressed the absolute priority of love for everything they do as a church. These words stand, therefore, as the nub of Paul’s instructions to a lively, divided, exuberant and precarious church. They articulate accurately what lay close to Paul’s heart.

4. Epilogue (16:21–24)

Paul now takes the pen from his amanuensis and records his personal farewell *with my own hand*. His parting shot must be aimed at certain troublemakers in Corinth: *If any one has no love for the Lord, let him be accursed (anathema)* (22). Paul clearly does not mean unbelievers, but those within the church at Corinth who have been causing such chaos to believers and such heartache to the apostle. ‘If a man’s heart is not aflame with love for the Lord, the root of the matter is not in him.’ The use of the word *anathema*, recalling the strange reference in 12:3 to someone as if under the inspiration of the Spirit saying that Jesus is *anathema*, might indicate that Paul knew who at Corinth had made that outrageous claim about Jesus, and that he is referring obliquely to the same person in these closing, personally-written, remarks.

The words *Our Lord, come!* translate an Aramaic phrase, *Maranatha*, which must go back to the early days of the church in Palestine. It expresses very concisely one of the deepest convictions of the primitive church from its very youngest days. It takes on even more profound meaning in the wake of Paul’s magnificent *tour de force* in chapter 15. ‘It expresses the eager longing felt by the Church in those early days for the speedy return of the Lord.’ Is our expectation and eager longing as fervent as this?

So Paul concludes with a message of grace and love. God's grace is coveted for *all* the Corinthians, even or especially those who have caused him the greatest problems and put up the fiercest opposition. Above all else, nothing can quench Paul's love for them all—in *Christ Jesus* (24). The best manuscripts omit the final *Amen*. This would mean that Paul's last word to the Corinthians was a reaffirmation of his central conviction: 'in Christ'. That has been the hub of his message throughout the letter, and with that truth he is content to leave the matters brought to his notice by the church at Corinth, 'those sanctified in Christ Jesus'.²

PAUL BEGINS HIS final greetings and "signoff" with two verses of brief exhortation (vv. 13–14). Four parallel commands employ military metaphors to encourage resoluteness in the faith (v. 13). "Be men of courage" should probably be rendered "be adults," that is, "put away the immaturity that has led to so many of your problems and grow up in the Lord." Balancing these commands to be strong is the call to love in verse 14. As with Paul's discussion of spiritual gifts in chapters 12–14, all Christian activity must take place within the sphere of putting others above self.

In verses 15–18, Paul gives thanks for three Corinthian Christians who have come to him in Ephesus and encouraged him. On Stephanas, see under 1:16. Nothing else is known about Fortunatus or Achaicus, although the former was a Hellenistic name often adopted by a freed slave (meaning "fortunate"). It is possible that both of these men, therefore, were part of Stephanas's household, once slaves but now more like "employees," though we have no way of being sure.

"The first converts in Achaia" (v. 15) translates an expression meaning "firstfruits" and raises the question of the apparent contradiction with Acts 17:34, in which several Athenians came to believe after Paul's Mars Hill speech and prior to his arrival in Corinth. There are several possible solutions to this problem: Paul had actually met these men somewhere in the countryside even before arriving in Athens; he is speaking of the first "household" rather than individual converts; or the few who responded in Athens did not seem like "firstfruits," that is, the promise of much more to come. But most likely Paul is simply using the term "Achaia," as certain ancient writers did elsewhere, for the more limited territory of Corinth and its environs (the Peloponnesus), rather than for all of the southern half of Greece.²

"Devoted" in verse 15 is literally "appointed." "The saints" are not the believers in Judea, as in verse 1, but refer primarily to the Corinthian Christians (and perhaps others) to whom these three men had ministered. Despite a vigorous debate on the meaning of "submit," its use in verse 16 most likely means to place oneself voluntarily under the authority of someone else. The word-play between verses 15b and 16a is brought out well in the NRSV: "they have devoted themselves *to the service* of the saints; I urge you to put yourselves *at the service* of such people."

² Prior, D. (1985). [*The message of 1 Corinthians: life in the local church*](#) (pp. 283–286). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

“Everyone who joins” (v. 16b) translates the Greek noun “coworkers.” “Labors” differs from ordinary ministry in that it implies *hard* work. “Supplied what was lacking” (v. 17) refers first of all to the spiritual refreshment and encouragement that Stephanas and his companions gave Paul (v. 18a). These men not only renewed Paul’s spirit but also encouraged the rest of the Corinthians. This is more naturally taken as highlighting their previous ministry to fellow believers in Corinth, but it could mean that in the very act of encouraging Paul they were also encouraging like-minded Corinthian believers. “Such men deserve recognition” (v. 18b) tones down the more forceful Greek imperative, “Recognize such people!” Such recognition would include acknowledgment of their service and an accompanying honor of submission as described in verse 16.

Verses 19–20 convey greetings to the Corinthian church from four groups of fellow believers: (1) the various churches in Asia Minor, almost certainly including Colosse and Ephesus, and possibly some of the other seven churches established in the vicinity (cf. Rev. 2–3); (2) Paul’s good friends Aquila and Priscilla, coworkers with him in Corinth (Acts 18:2–3) and later partners with him in his ministry in Ephesus (18:18–19); (3) the specific house church that met in their home; and (4) Paul’s other immediate companions in ministry. The “holy kiss” was probably borrowed from common ancient practice, both sacred and secular, Jewish and Gentile. Customarily, men greeted other men and women other women by embracing each other and kissing one another on the cheek.

After verse 20, Paul stops dictating his letter to his amanuensis (the “secretary” writing down the letter)—was it Sosthenes (1:1)? Paul now picks up pen and papyrus himself to write the closing words in his own hand (v. 21), as was his custom (cf. Gal. 6:11; 2 Thess. 3:17; other ancient letter writers often did the same). The one letter in which we definitely know the name of Paul’s amanuensis is Romans, when that individual, Tertius, sent his own greetings at the end (Rom. 16:22).

Both parts of verse 22 follow abruptly. They may reflect conventional liturgical utterances of the early church. Paul’s “curse” utilizes the expression *anathema*, as in 12:3 (cf. also Gal. 1:8). “Come, O Lord” is the more likely of two possible translations of the Aramaic *Marana tha* (the other one being, “the Lord has come”). Together the two expressions reflect the profound seriousness with which the early church viewed faithfulness to Christ in view of his imminent return.

Verse 23 substitutes Paul’s favorite word for “grace” (*charis*) for the more conventional Greek “good-bye” (*eroso*). And, as in his introductory greeting, Paul makes the Christian perspective of his farewell clear with a reference to the Lord Jesus. Verse 24 ends on an upbeat note with one final reminder of his love for these often exasperating Christians in Corinth. The “Amen” is missing from some of the oldest manuscripts and may well reflect a pious addition by an early scribe.³

Bridging Context

³ Blomberg, C. (1994). [1 Corinthians](#) (pp. 337–339). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

AS WITH HIS opening, the way to recognize what Paul stresses most in his closing is to see what is most distinctive. Ancient Greco-Roman letters did not have as conventional or formalized endings as they did beginnings, but common elements included “greetings, a health wish, the date, a concluding autograph, and postscripts.” Almost always there was at least one closing wish of some form. Paul himself usually includes exhortations, a wish for peace, greetings to the church addressed (including some from his various companions), and a benediction. The most striking divergence from this pattern in the closing of 1 Corinthians is the addition of the curse, combined with the call for the Lord’s return in verse 22. On the other hand, if Paul is relying here on some preexistent liturgy known to the Corinthians, then the distinctiveness of this verse is somewhat tempered.

The exhortations of verses 13–14 disclose an urgency even in Paul’s concluding remarks. The lack of connection between these two verses highlights their striking juxtaposition. Love without strength deteriorates into mere sentimentality; strength without love risks becoming tyrannical.

Verses 15–18 contain key implications for the developing concept of Christian ministry in the early church. We are still a long way from the institutionalization of early catholicism in the second century, but we see hints that Paul envisions certain authorities to whom others are to submit, a hint that we would not have necessarily received from reading 14:26. But the kind of authority Paul endorses is what is usually considered the most legitimate kind; it is an authority that is earned through humble service, not imposed by holding an office or dependent solely on charismatic personality or expert knowledge. One might even speak of mutual submission here; the Corinthians must submit to those who have themselves chosen to serve (or submit to) their fellow Christians.

Paul’s generalizing language (“submit to such as these” in v. 16) enables us to apply his principles widely to all similar servant-leaders. “Function, not status, was the important thing in the church’s ministry: those who did the work were to receive the appropriate recognition and respect.” Hebrews 13:17 generalizes a little further (“Obey your leaders and submit to their authority”), but even that command is dependent on the writer’s earlier reference in verse 7: “Remember your leaders.... Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith.” Christians in all times and places should cooperate with and defer to church leaders who have earned that respect through faithful service, but no New Testament text enjoins blind subservience to authoritarian or incompetent Christian office-holders. While Paul never totally abolishes hierarchy, he radically redefines its authority in terms of service rather than privilege.

If Fortunatus and Achaicus once were slaves, then the fact that Paul calls the Corinthians to submit also to them reminds us of the radically equalizing function of the gospel across socioeconomic strata of society. Stephanas’ household could well include younger people or even children; this possibility reminds us that youth are often among the most zealous and energetically able to serve. But in lieu of more specific information about these individuals, these suggestions must remain speculative.

Sometimes Paul sends greetings from several individuals by name to a particular church he is addressing; here he mentions only Aquila and Priscilla (v. 19). Perhaps they were the only other immediate companions of his who were known to the Corinthians, besides the three men of verses 15–18. But they play a prominent role throughout the Acts and Paul’s letters as his coworkers. Interestingly, in four of the six New Testament references to this husband and wife team, Priscilla is named first (Acts 18:18, 26; Rom. 16:3; 2 Tim. 4:19; the other reference which preserves the order found here is Acts 18:2). To name a wife before her husband would have

stood out in ancient letter-writing as unusual, suggesting that Priscilla may have been the more significant partner in some respect. Paul is known for elevating the role of women over against the social background of his day, even if he stops short of demonstrably promoting full-fledged egalitarianism.

For the implications of the house-church model of ancient worship (v. 19), see under 14:26–33a. The holy kiss (v. 20) has remained a liturgical part of some Christian traditions. That it was largely limited to same sex partners in a heterosexual Christian community guarded it against having sexual overtones. Many cultures throughout church history have preserved a close parallel to this practice in public greetings more generally. Where there are dangers of arousing inappropriate desires or behavior, some other cultural analog should be sought. The point was that Christians should demonstrate their affection for one another in warm, interpersonal gestures of nonsexual intimacy, and this can be accomplished in many ways.

The greeting of verse 21 follows a letter-writing convention of antiquity, so that too much should not be read into its presence. But it is probably safe to conclude that Paul saw these words as adding a personal touch, a guarantee of the genuineness of the letter (cf. his concern in 2 Thess. 2:1–2 of a possible forgery circulating in his name), and a reiteration of his apostolic authority.

Verse 22 reminds us how foreign certain aspects of New Testament Christianity are to many other generations of church history. Some of the harshness of Paul’s language against those who do not love the Lord may be attributed to cultural convention; indeed, Paul’s anathemas are mild compared to some found among the rabbis, at Qumran, or in Greco-Roman circles. We must also recall that Paul has unique emotions invested in the churches to which he gave birth, and he is talking about people here who demonstrate by their beliefs or actions that they are rank unbelievers despite professing to be Christians. Only here and in Titus 3:15 does Paul use the verb *phileo* (meaning brotherly love) rather than *agapao* (the most common verb for Christian love). His choice may simply have been influenced by the cognate *philema* (“kiss”) in verse 20, but he may also be implying, “if anyone does not have even as much affection as φιλεῖν [i.e., the love of ordinary friends or siblings for each other].” Yet having said all this, Paul’s anathema still stands out as a reminder of the exclusiveness and zeal that characterized the early church’s mission.

Conversely, *Marana tha* in verse 22b (see NIV note, “In Aramaic the expression *Come, O Lord* is *Marana tha*) reflects a strong longing for Christ’s return by one of his servants who had experienced enough hostility in his life on this earth not to want to prolong it unnecessarily (cf. Phil. 1:21–24). Paul longed for the coming Day that would make present sufferings pale into insignificance (Rom. 8:18; 2 Cor. 4:17). The term also employs an Aramaic word for “Lord” used in some Jewish circles for Yahweh himself (*mar*), a vivid reminder that high Christology (Jesus as fully God) was not merely the product of a later, more Hellenistic development in the church but was part of the faith of Aramaic-speaking Jewish Christianity from its earliest days.

Despite the strong language of verse 22, Paul must nevertheless close on a positive note of encouragement. In no other letter does he end with this kind of statement of his love, but it was profoundly needed in fractured Corinth. “Paul had been stern with the Corinthian believers, but he closed his letter by assuring them of his love. After all, ‘Faithful are the wounds of a friend’ (Prov. 27:6).”⁴

⁴ Blomberg, C. (1994). [1 Corinthians](#) (pp. 339–342). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

Contemporary Significance

THE BALANCE REFLECTED in verses 13–14 between firmness and gentleness, between power and love, surely remains crucial today. Many preach love without judgment; some judgment without love. Scripture consistently holds both together.

Stephanas and his two companions (vv. 15–18) remind us that the most legitimate form of church leadership or authority in our day still remains that which is acknowledged by fellow Christians as stemming from devoted service to the saints (v. 15). While some want to abolish hierarchy and others to employ it in authoritarian fashion, servant leaders guide by loving example, to whom fellow Christians should submit (see further the applications of chap. 4, p. 93). The model of these three men should challenge all Christians today to get involved when they see a need waiting to be met, regardless of whether they hold any formal office or are first invited to participate. We are tearing down today some of the unhealthy barriers between clergy and laity; one helpful principle derivable from this text is to recognize as leaders those who have emerged from within a congregation as its most dedicated servants. Megachurches that are increasingly identifying such commitment among their own membership and then training those persons to be leaders (or sponsoring their training) may well have a good handle on the application of this principle.

The comings and goings of Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus, like the frequent travels of Aquila and Priscilla to establish home congregations in each community in which they lived, remind us of the ways in which the early church was international and yet interdependent. In our day, when travel and communication make networking and cooperation among various parts of the body of Christ so much easier, it is all the more necessary that we take advantage of this technology. And to the extent that more and more Christians' lives and work revolve around that technology, the need for the uniquely personal touch and for the intimacy possible among believers, so ably modeled by Paul and his coworkers, is growing rapidly.

Both parts of verse 22 call us back to a holy outrage at those who generally try to destroy or corrupt the church today, masquerading as believers. Even as we warn of God's impending judgment against such people (Paul's *anathema*), the cry *Marana tha* reminds us to leave that judgment to God in Christ upon his return. One thinks naturally of the various sects and cults that lead people astray in the name of Jesus; indeed many of these can trace their roots back directly or indirectly to ancient Hellenistic philosophy and even to Gnosticism (particularly the religious sciences—Christian Science, Unity School of Christianity, etc.) But we recall too that Paul's harshest words were consistently reserved for the legalists of his day, particularly among the conservative Judaizing factions (cf. Gal. 1:6–10; Phil. 3:2–4:1). In one instance, he even declares divisiveness itself worthy of excommunication (Tit. 3:10–11). So our contemporary applications must range closer to home as well, as we scrupulously ward off and avoid the legalists in our evangelical Christian circles. Those whose long lists of dos and don'ts in their policies on Christian lifestyle go far beyond scriptural commands, like some of the extreme “witch-hunters” in our midst, ironically may be more in need of church discipline themselves than some of those they consistently attack.

Paul's cry of *Marana tha* reminds us of how much our world, even our Christian world, lives in the present without longing for the age to come. We have already spoken of this generation's attempt to create Paradise on earth rather than genuinely longing for Christ's return and the perfect new heavens and new earth that will subsequently be created (see above, pp. 310–11). Little wonder that the 1970s film, *Heaven Can Wait*, about a professional football quarterback who died in a car accident and was disappointed to find himself in heaven because he would miss out on the Super Bowl, proved so popular. Its story line remains as timely and poignant at the end of the century.

Fittingly, Paul closes with one final reminder of the centrality of “grace” and “love” (vv. 23–24). We continue to need both; indeed, we ought to crave them. For detailed application, see under chapter 13. If our generation has sometimes removed God from the concept of love, it has at least correctly captured the centrality of love for any viable human ethic. Love does “make the world go ‘round,” but the only truly life-and world-changing love that will last is that which is founded on a saving relationship with Jesus Christ.⁵

⁵ Blomberg, C. (1994). [1 Corinthians](#) (pp. 342–344). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.