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Andrew M. Davis

Sermon Notes

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Healthy Churches Are Full of Love

1 Corinthians 16:15-24

We come to the end of a marvelous journey... this is, by my count, my 75th sermon in 1 Corinthians. We have had a wonderful time, seemingly at the expense of the Corinthians who lived so long ago... a critically dysfunctional church that struggled with all manner of doctrinal and practical issues. We have seen the Apostle Paul pour out truth and love on them in section after section, seeking to be an instrument of the Holy Spirit in their sanctification, their healing, their repentance... for their full fruitfulness and for the glory of God.

The dysfunctionality and weak doctrine and sinfulness was devastating to them, but very instructive for us... as it has been for every generation of Christians for twenty centuries; every local church has had to address variations of many of these same issues; so the Holy Spirit in his wisdom led Paul to write perfect words, timeless words, that serve every generation in understanding the true Christian life in the context of a healthy Christian church

What an amazing journey this has been! And now we come to Paul's final words in this epistle

A way to sum up these words is to understand the last of the five commands he gave that we studied last week:

1 Corinthians 16:14 Let all that you do be done in love.

I'm going to use that as an organizing theme for Paul's final comments... but couch it in terms of a healthy local church... a healthy local church will display love in these ways

I. Love in Evangelism

1 Corinthians 16:15 You know that the household of Stephanas were the first converts in Achaia

A. Healthy Churches Are Active in the Harvest

1. The actual term for the household of Stephanas was "firstfruits"
2. A term that implies the beginning of a vast harvest... there is a harvest of souls that we must see spiritually

John 4:35 Do you not say, 'Four months more and then the harvest'? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest.

3. Achaia was the southern region of Greece that included Athens and Corinth; when Paul came there from Thessalonica, his first success was with this man Stephanas and his household... family and servants alike... he actually baptized Stephanas himself
4. Paul's evangelistic zeal is well-known:

Acts 20:24 I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me-- the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace.

5. Though here, Paul doesn't command the Corinthians to be active in winning the lost, it is throughout his training of them... he sets his own zeal up as a role model for them to follow

2 Corinthians 5:14 For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died.

2 Corinthians 5:20 We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.

B. What About FBC?

1. Generally a failure to be vigorously active in evangelism is a failure of love and of faith
2. We don't love the Lord or the lost enough
3. We don't weep over the spiritual condition of the lost or their terrifying destiny
4. And we don't share the Lord's passion to seek and to save the lost
5. We **MUST** make this our top priority in 2021... we are surrounded by fields that are ripe for harvest... we have to be willing to step out in faith and see who the Lord will lead us to harvest

II. Love in Passionate Service to the Saints

^{KJV} 1 Corinthians 16:15 I beseech you, brethren, (ye know the house of Stephanas, that it is the firstfruits of Achaia, and that they have addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints,)

- A. Remarkable Words: “Addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints”
 1. Literally “arranged, appointed, set themselves in careful order” to serve the saints
 2. It implies intelligent planning and diligent labor
 3. Also a heart of service: **WHAT CAN I DO FOR THE SAINTS TODAY?**
- B. Ministry to the Saints: Serving needs, encouraging, caring for sick people, giving money where needed, speaking words of faith... whatever they could do to assist in the salvation journey of other believers... they **WORKED HARD** at it!
- C. Healthy Churches Love One Another and Serve One Another
 1. Think of the footwashing... Jesus was meeting a practical need
 2. Then he commanded his followers to love each other as he had just loved them

John 13:14-15 Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. ¹⁵ I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.

3. Godly widows

1 Timothy 5:10 well known for her good deeds, such as bringing up children, showing hospitality, washing the feet of the saints, helping those in trouble and devoting herself to all kinds of good deeds.

D. FBC: Does this characterize you?

1. Do you have a diligent, planned-out strategy for serving the saints in your life... other Christians?
2. Hospitality: COVID has made this harder, obviously... but that will not last forever
3. Going through the church's phone directory, seeing a name, calling them to encourage them or ask if they need anything
4. Helping Christ's brothers and sisters... the "sheep and the goats"... Jesus said "Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it for me."

III. Love in Submission to Leaders

1 Corinthians 16:15-16 You know that the household of Stephanas were the first converts in Achaia, and they have devoted themselves to the service of the saints. I urge you, brothers, ¹⁶ to submit to such as these and to everyone who joins in the work, and labors at it.

A. The Basic Command: Submit to Your Leaders

1. Stephanas was a key leader in the Corinthian church

1 Corinthians 16:17-18 I was glad when Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus arrived, because they have supplied what was lacking from you. ¹⁸ For they refreshed my spirit and yours also. Such men deserve recognition.

2. Paul's basic command is clear in verse 16... submit to such a diligent hard-working man... and not only him, but all who labor so diligently in the work of the Lord
3. Loving churches submit to their leaders

Hebrews 13:17 Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you.

4. This Corinthian church was fractious and rebellious... they would have been hard for Paul to lead, never mind Stephanas, who was no apostle
5. Paul wants them to submit to such godly, hardworking leaders and not make life miserable for them
6. Some commentators think this command extends to all hardworking Christians... anyone who works hard in serving the Lord, others should submit to them
 - a. In one sense, I understand that view
 - b. For example, a woman who is in charge of a wedding reception knows exactly what needs to be done to decorate and arrange the food from the caterers and how to set up the timing of the whole event on that day
 - c. Others who want to help need to fit in with her vision and follow her leadership
 - d. That is true of many detailed ministries and events in the life of the church
 - e. But the word "submit" has such a strong sense of God-ordained leadership in the life of the church, and I would say that is the home-base of this command... obey God-ordained leadership for the unity and peace and fruitfulness of the church

B. FBC

1. When I came here in 1998, this church had some amazing brothers and sisters who responded very well to the godly pastors that preceded me... but there were many others who were not submissive at all
2. Some church members felt it was their duty to be a check and balance to the pastor's authority, and also (it seems) we jealous of their own power in the life of the church
3. A few years later, however, significant changes happened in the life of the church; we moved from a single-elder model to a plurality of elders duly voted in and established as spiritual leaders by the congregation... that is check and balance enough... and since that time, I think the membership of this church has delighted in submitting to godly leaders
4. We just need to keep up that excellent pattern
5. Many churches are ripped apart by sin in the area of leadership and submission... ungodly leaders, and ungodly followers
6. Let's pray that God would protect us from both!

IV. Love in Refreshing the Saints

1 Corinthians 16:17-18 I was glad when Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus arrived, because they have supplied what was lacking from you. ¹⁸ For they refreshed my spirit and yours also.

- A. Paul Says that the Visit of these Three Godly Men REFRESHED His Spirit
 1. According to chapter 1, Paul had heard from the household of Chloe of the tragic factions and divisions in the Corinthian church
 2. This must have broken Paul's heart
 3. Ministry is HARD... life is wearying anyway; but Paul had in some senses the hardest life in church history... his list of sufferings and persecutions is overwhelming; but the hardest of all was his constant worry over the churches he'd planted:

2 Corinthians 11:28-29 Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches. ²⁹ Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn?

4. When Stephanas and the two other men came, they brought the letter from the Corinthians, filled with all the issues he addressed in this epistle... but they also brought their own faith in Christ and love for Christ and love for him... and just that level of genuine Christian fellowship was refreshing

B. What does “refreshed” mean?

1. It gives a sense of spiritual revival, spiritual renewal

Isaiah 40:30-31 Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; ³¹ but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.

Psalms 23:2-3 He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, ³ he restores my soul.

2. There are some people who drain you—like discontent people, like Eeyore or the quintessential “Debbie downer”... they complain, find fault, murmur, whine
3. BUT people who refresh others are a delight to be around... they give you hope, they feed your joy, they encourage you—meaning, you have more courage and inspiration and boldness to serve the Lord after you have spent time with them
4. They speak peace, they speak life, they speak hope into your heart... they do this primarily by means of the Word of God; they give you a verse to build you up; they are men and women of faith, immersed always in what God can do

Illustration: John Newton’s ministry to William Cowper

John Piper opened my eyes to it... Piper called Newton the healthiest pastor he’s ever studied in church history; Newton was an excellent friend and counsellor to William Cowper, who was clinically depressed and frequently suicidal. Newton had a

marvelous blend of gospel grace with earthy humor and optimism and wise counsel and cheerful persistence

Here's a sample of how he approached life:

[Imagine] two heaps... one of human happiness, [the other of human] misery; now if I can take but the smallest bit from one heap and add to the other, I carry a point. If, as I go home, a child has dropped a halfpenny, and if, by giving it another, I can wipe away its tears, I feel I have done something. I should be glad to do greater things, but I will not neglect this. When I hear a knock on my study door, I hear a message from God; it may be a lesson of instruction, perhaps a lesson of penitence; but, since it is his message, it must be interesting

We want to be the kind of friend who can bring continual refreshment to the people we interact with... like a spiritual oasis in the midst of a dry and weary land; people come to us, feed on our hope, get energized, and go back out into the world

V. Love in Recognizing Servants

1 Corinthians 16:18 Such people deserve recognition.

- A. Recognition is not something any servant of Christ should ever SEEK
- B. But it something that servants of Christ should frequently GIVE
- C. It is important for healthy local churches to recognize noteworthy deeds and ministries in their midst, and single them out for praise and encouragement

In Philippians 2, Paul mentions a godly man named Epaphroditus, a messenger from the Philippian church; Paul says that this man risked his life for the gospel, and became very ill... even to the point of death; God healed him, and Paul wanted the Philippians to give him proper recognition

Philippians 2:29-30 Welcome him in the Lord with great joy, and honor men like him, ³⁰ because he almost died for the work of Christ, risking his life to make up for the help you could not give me.

1. If churches never do this, people can become discouraged...
2. Choice servants of the Lord can wonder if their ministries are making any difference at all
3. This is especially true when it comes to spiritual ministries, whose ultimate harvest is invisible
4. Beyond this is that churches honoring people for specific fruitful ministries set up **ROLE MODELS** for others to follow!
5. Yet, it is important that this never become a **GOAL** for any servant of the Lord

Luke 17:9-10 Would he thank the servant because he did what he was told to do? ¹⁰ So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty

D. FBC: Do we do enough to honor the faithful servants, men and women of God, whose service makes all the difference in the life of our church?

1. Women who teach and care for very young children during the services
2. Men who cook for events like youth flag football games and men's breakfasts
3. People who visit shut-ins and bring them words of encouragement
4. We need to be the kind of church that notices and encourages and honors these kinds of ministries

VI. Love in Greeting the Saints

1 Corinthians 16:19-20 The churches in the province of Asia send you greetings. Aquila and Priscilla greet you warmly in the Lord, and so does the church that meets at their house. ²⁰ All the brothers here send you greetings. Greet one another with a holy kiss.

A. This is a very common feature of the end of Paul's letters

1. In fact, the Book of Romans includes greetings to over 35 individuals or groups
2. Almost all of Paul's epistles end with greetings like this

B. Here:

1. The churches in the province of Asia (Asia Minor, modern-day Turkey)
2. These are the churches that were planted by the men that Paul trained diligently over two years, based in Ephesus

***Acts 19:9-10 [Paul] had discussions daily in the lecture hall of Tyrannus.
¹⁰ This went on for two years, so that all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord.***

3. These greetings from other churches give us as sense of the worldwide church of Jesus Christ... we are in no way alone; we are not the only people the word of God came to; we are part of a massive movement of God all over the earth
4. Aquila and Priscilla are Paul's fellow tent-makers; very skillful in evangelism, they trained Apollos more accurately in the facts of the gospel; they had a church that met in their house, as many churches back then (and today!) are very small and meet in people's houses

C. Greet One Another With a Holy Kiss

1. This is something that cannot be replaced by VIRTUAL CHURCH or livestreaming...
2. While we are grateful for those technologies, nothing beats the physical presence of a brother or sister in Christ, a kind handshake, a loving hug brother to brother or sister to sister
3. Jesus did many of his healings with a TOUCH; physical touch is vital to health and a sense of love and community

VII. Love for the Word of God

1 Corinthians 16:21 I, Paul, write this greeting in my own hand.

- A. Paul Wanted the Churches to Know His Letter was Genuine
- B. Many of these letters were dictated to secretaries... like Tertius, who wrote down Paul's letter to the Romans
- C. But at the end of his letters, Paul would make his mark so they could know it was genuine

2 Thessalonians 3:17 I, Paul, write this greeting in my own hand, which is the distinguishing mark in all my letters. This is how I write.

- D. Of course, since we don't have the actual originals of any of Paul's letters, these words are obsolete... but they show the concern for apostolic authority in the written word of God

- E. Beyond this is the usual closing:

1 Corinthians 16:23 The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you.

1. "Grace to you" is how started his letters
2. "Grace be with you" is how he ended them
3. It's like his letters are a corridor of grace that you walk through, receiving showers of blessing that Paul wants to continue

Illus.: Massive automated car wash... driving through, receiving the series of pre-programed dosages of water and soap and brushes and buffers and wax and drying... you're moving through the pathway getting everything you need for a spotless, gleaming, beautiful car...

So it is with one of Paul's epistles... you move into the pathway of grace, get showered with the grace of God's Word, and the grace of God goes with you as you leave

This is Christ's love letter to every Christian through the Apostle Paul:

1 Corinthians 16:24 My love to all of you in Christ Jesus. Amen.

- F. FBC: Cherish the Word of God... delight in it, yearn for it, feed on it

VIII. Love for the Lord Jesus Christ

1 Corinthians 16:22 If anyone does not love the Lord-- a curse be on him. Come, O Lord!

- A. Perhaps some in the Corinthian church itself didn't really love Christ
- B. But this seems addressed to the outside world... to any who will not love Christ; if they will not repent and delight in him, we will not regret their final judgment under the curse of God... God has sent his Son into the world as a perfect display of his love

John 3:16 "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

God is patiently delaying wrath and justice, and all day long is holding out his hands to disobedient and obstinate people;

But if in the end they will not love Christ, we do not want to spend eternity with them!

C. COME LORD JESUS!

1 Corinthians 16:22 Come, O Lord!

"Maranatha!" A yearning for the Lord Jesus to return in glory and consummate his salvation plan!

Every Christian yearns to see Jesus exalted, to see death defeated, to see all enemies overwhelmed with his power, to see all his saints exalted in glory, to see the New Heavens and New Earth radiant with light, to see the New Jerusalem descend...

After the Apostle John had seen this future glory in a vision, he recorded the words of Jesus saying THREE TIMES in Revelation 22 "I am coming SOON" ... this was his response:

Revelation 22:20 Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.

So FBC should be a church that is constantly ready for the Second Coming of Christ and the glories that will follow!

We should talk continually about heaven... setting our hearts on that future day!