

Final Concerns

1 Corinthians 16:13-24

Paul brings this winding and winsome letter in for a landing. The most productive apostle exhorts, connects, encourages, and loves so effectively in conclusion. He has five exhortations, particular brothers to commend, and final salutations offered in the gospel.

Exhortations

The four commands of verse 13 require attention and courage. To *watch* means to pay attention closely for the duration. This is the same word Jesus uses when telling the disciples to be ready for the coming destruction of Jerusalem and when He tells the disciples to watch and pray in Gethsemane (Matt. 24:42; 26:41). As Christians we must keep an eye on our life and doctrine lest we backslide (cf. 1 Tim. 4:16). There's a difference between watching—seeing with understanding what is happening—and staring passively like a fool. Only by understanding and keeping our hearts and minds growing in the grace of God will we be able to do the second thing, to stand fast in the faith. You will have to stand because the spirit of the age is blowing. Is Christianity not cool enough? Woke enough? Not comfortable enough? Not tolerant enough? You want to be like a tree planted by the river, nourished by grace, informed by the Word, and strengthened by the church. The third command ought to be translated “act like men” (*andrizesthe*) and not “be brave” as the NKJV has it, although bravery is included. Paul is not excluding women from this command in the corporate body of the church, but he is calling the church to masculine virtue, just as at other times the church shows feminine virtue (cf. 1 Thess. 2:7). But men are called to fight, lead, and protect both as husbands and fathers at home and in the church. King Lemuel relays the oracle his *mother* taught him: “Do not give your strength to women, nor your ways to that which destroys kings” (Prov. 31:3). Men give their strength to women when they're immoral like the Corinthian men visiting prostitutes, but also when they are like Adam listening to Eve instead of correcting and leading her (Gen. 3:6, 12). Godly manhood calls a man to know the direction his household ought to be going and to be taking them there, and so for church fathers. Fourthly, the church should be strong: “*be strengthened*”. This is strength in Christ, not chest-thumping, knuckle-dragging bravado. But it is strength. These four things, and all they do, are to be exhibited in love (v14). Toughness and tenderness are friends.

The Right Hand of Fellowship

Paul urges the church to know about Stephanus' household, the firstfruits of the harvest in Achaia, and to submit to them and everyone who works and labors with him (vv15-16). The KJV says “they have addicted themselves to the ministry” (v15). This letter has so much teaching on living in community—against contentions (1:10-17) and factions (3:1-16), sexual wisdom and church discipline (5:1-13), suing people (6:1-11), spiritual gifts in the body (12:1-31)—and here is a blunt command to listen to everyone who works with Paul. He wants the church to work together. Edwards said,

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“Many work, few toil.” Stephanus, Fortunatus, and Achaicus probably brought their letter to Paul, and they it “filled” him up (v18). When Christians in the church know, honor, and serve one another, they thrive. Paul requires them to acknowledge the work these men are doing (v18).

Salutations

Just like “Amen” doesn’t mean “I can open my eyes now”, Paul’s goodbye isn’t a rote way to end the letter. The churches of Asia loved the Corinthians and express it by greetings through Paul. Aquila and Priscilla are mentioned six times in Scripture. They were kicked out of Rome when Claudius expelled the Jews in A.D. 49, made tents in Corinth (Acts 18:2-3), hosted the church in Ephesus, and eventually went back to Rome (Rom. 16:3). That whole church says hi (vv19-20). Some Christians have keyed off this and other mentions of the “holy kiss” to develop a liturgical tradition. We ought to make a tradition of making our greetings, handshakes, and hugs holy. These things matter which is why we find them in Scripture. Paul dictated his letters but picked up the pen at the end to show it was from him (v21). Along with these warm greetings, if anyone is faking it and manipulating the church for selfish gains, God damn him, which is what *anathema* means (v22). “O Lord, come!” is *maranatha*, a prayer like in the Lord’s Prayer. Paul wants the kingdom to come and people to be in fellowship with the Lord. He prays that the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ would be with them along with his love with all of them in Christ.