

DAY FOUR

Reading for today: 1 Corinthians 16:13-18

Insights and aids:

Perhaps it is right before you step out of the door, leaving the baby-sitter with the children. Or maybe it is when you are about to drive away, having unloaded your son or daughter for his or her first semester at college. There are those moments when we say “just a few last thoughts” before departing. In some fashion, that is what Paul is doing as he wraps up his letter to the Corinthians.

Obviously in these closing words, Paul is not going to unpack new ideas, untouched on in this letter. What he is doing is reminding his readers of a few important things he has already written about. For example, note (in 16:13-14):

Be watchful: Although this particular word is not used elsewhere in First Corinthians, the idea does seem to be there. Throughout the letter, Paul is calling the Corinthians to pay attention to how they are living, and that is the sense of this word.

Stand firm in the faith: This idea comes up occasionally in the epistle, notably in 15:1 where Paul calls his friends to “stand” in the truth of the Gospel which they had heard from him.

Act like men: Paul has, more than once, called the Corinthians to no longer be immature in their lives in Christ but mature. That idea is reflected in this call to “be men” (not putting the focus on “maleness” as much as on being “adult”).

Be strong: This is, again, a word that doesn’t appear elsewhere in this letter, but the sense of living vigorously with strength does fit the kind of bold life in grace and community Paul wants for them.

Let all that you do be done in love: This refrain is something that is woven throughout the letter to the Corinthians, finding a high point in Paul’s exposition of love in chapter 13.

Thinking about the passage:

As you think back over the epistle, how do the ideas reiterated here help you grasp what Paul really wants for his readers?

Which of these ideas do you think is most prominent in the letter? Why?

Which of these calls do you believe the Lord wants you to make a priority in taking to heart? Why?

DAY FIVE

Reading for today: 1 Corinthians 16:19-24

Insights and aids:

As you come to the last few verses of this epistle, notice the “feel” of the words.

One word is used five times in these closing verses; typically translated “greet” (the verb form is found twice in 16:19, twice in 16:20; the noun form of the root word is found in 16:21). The verb literally conveys the sense of “enfold in the arms” and came to refer to appropriate “greeting” (as was commonly used in the close of a letter). But the repeated use of the word and the sense with which it is used in these ending verses makes it clear that this is more than a mere formality for Paul.

What helps us see that this greeting is more than formality? The greeting sent by the church that meets in Aquila and Prisca’s house is “heartly” (16:19; literally “much greeting!”). The greeting Paul encourages the saints to exchange is “with a holy kiss” (16:20; an appropriate expression of sincere affection). And Paul’s final words send a message of his genuine love for those to whom he writes.

The “feel” of these words is that Paul is not offering some clichéd Christian greeting, but that he is expressing (and encouraging the expression) of real and sincere warm love for these brothers and sisters in Christ.

We might say to someone “I love you in the Lord!” and we mean that we are willing to put up with them for the sake of Christ. But this is much more than that. This is a greeting that comes from the heart, shaped by the Spirit, filled with affection, and appropriate for those who share in one common life in Christ together. This is consistent with Paul’s heart-felt and warm affections for those he has come to know “in Christ” (as reflected in other passages like Philippians 1:8 and Romans 12:9-10).

Thinking about the passage:

What is the difference between “kindly putting up” with others and coming to have genuine and appropriate Christ-like affection for them? Why does this matter?

How does Paul’s warm love for others compare with your “brotherly love” for others in the body?

Talk to the Lord about how He wants you to both love and greet those with whom you share life in the Gospel.

You might not think about it this way, but Paul was a man much like us. Although he was an apostle and the Lord worked through him mightily, he was “just a guy.” And as he closes out his letter to the Corinthians, we get a little taste of just what kind of man he was.

DAY ONE

Reading for today: 1 Corinthians 16:1-7

Insights and aids:

It might help to read the last section of chapter 15 before beginning chapter 16 (15:20-58). In chapter 15, Paul had addressed the issue of the resurrection—both Christ’s resurrection and the believer’s future resurrection.

What is so interesting is that Paul moves so easily from that profound spiritual matter to the issue of a collection for the needs of the saint in Jerusalem. For Paul, deep and rich spiritual reflection is not antithetical to practical and purposeful care for others. They go hand in hand.

As you read through this section of chapter 16, try and get a feel for not only what Paul is writing about but what kinds of things must be stirring in him to write such things.

He really is concerned for the “saints” and wants the believers in Corinth to participate in meeting the needs of others (16:1-2). But notice how he wants the offering to be received:

It is not to be taken when he is there.

It doesn’t necessarily have to be sent with him (although he might go “if it seems advisable.”)

Apparently, Paul doesn’t want the Corinthians to “make a fuss” about him as the focal point of the collection. And there we gain a little insight about this great apostle. Although he longs for the Corinthians to participate in the meeting of the need, he doesn’t want his own presence to be the key issue.

What does he really want when he is among them? He wants to spend time with them. He had already spent many months in Corinth when the church first



was established and now, in thinking about them, he anticipates getting more time with them. For all his travels, Paul was not simple flitting from place to place. He loves those he served, he served them well and invested deeply in them. He took the time to minister to them as the Lord permitted.

Thinking about the passage:

What does this add to your understanding of the apostle Paul to see how he wants to be with the Corinthians but how he doesn't want his visit to "be about him"?

How does this attitude, reflected in these simple words, underscore the kind of "life in the body" idea that Paul argued for throughout this letter? How do you see his own thinking reflected in his living?

How can his attitude, reflected here, encourage you in your participation in the lives of others?

DAY TWO

Reading for today: 1 Corinthians 16:5-9

Insights and aids:

Is it "spiritual" to make plans? Or is it more "spiritually mature" to be serendipitous and let the Spirit "lead the way"? Although Paul is not directly speaking to this idea, what he writes here does offer us a little window into how a spiritually mature leader deals with such things.

Notice the things that Paul says about his future plans:

He has some specific intentionality. He plans to travel through Macedonia (where he would, most likely, visit the churches in Philippi and Thessalonica; 16:5) He is looking to stay for some time with the believers in Corinth when he gets there (16:6-7). He is currently in Ephesus and would like to remain there a bit longer (16:8).

He recognizes that his plans are not "written in stone." He has plans but holds them with some tentativeness (16:6).

He sees that a great deal of what unfolds has to do with what the Lord "permits." He affirms the Lord's right to mess with, adjust, and modify his plans (16:7).

His plans appear to be rooted, primarily, not in what he whimsically would like to do, but in what opportunities are presented to him for being involved in the things of the Lord (16:9). Opposition does not dissuade him; opportunity

beckons him.

We can't reduce Paul's words here to a "system" or a method of making plans. Paul doesn't write these things to the Corinthians to instruct them in "how to plan your future." But in what he writes we do get some insight into how he thought about and how he thought through how his days would unfold.

The flexibility and adaptability in his planning is reflected in James' instructions to other believers in James 4:13-17. There we also find both anchors for a healthy view of the future: Some specific intentionality coupled with a proper willingness to hold all such plans loosely in the anticipation that the Lord might just have other things in mind.

Thinking about the passage:

Which anchor do you find yourself more prone to hang on to: Your specific plans for the future or the willingness to flex anticipating that the Lord might have other things in mind? Why?

Apparently, following the lead of the Spirit is not antithetical to having specific plans. Why not?

Apparently appropriately planning for future life and ministry is not the "be all and end of all" of how we move forward in life. Why not?

Talk to the Lord about how He intends for you to live anchored in these two ideas we see in Paul.

DAY THREE

Reading for today: 1 Corinthians 16:10-12, 15-18

Insights and aids:

Paul has made it clear in this letter that there are no "lone ranger" saints. In his discussion of the foundation of ministry in the early chapters and, in particular, in his exposition of life in the body in chapters 12 through 14, it is very clear that Paul recognizes that every Christian needs others with whom he or she can grow, do life, and share in ministry. But having heard that from Paul, it might still be easy to think that such advice is appropriate for everyone . . . except the great apostle Paul! Surely, he was rightly a "lone ranger" saint. Or was he?

As you read through this closing section of his letter to the Corinthians, pause in your reading and jot down a few notes. Specifically, take note of two things: Who does Paul mention by name? And what does Paul have to say about those he mentions by name?

Who does Paul mention? What does he say about the person?

In this section, Paul is not giving instruction about how to "do life" with others—but what he writes does provide us some insight into how he did life with others. We get to see into the apostle's life—and thus learn from his example—through what he writes.

He readily identifies with others; Apollos is a brother, others are his co-laborers.

He gladly affirms what God does through them; Timothy is doing the work of the Lord just as Paul does, those who have come to Paul from Corinth are joyfully received as ones who could refresh him.

Others who share in the ministry are also to be received well, appropriately honored, submitted to.

Apparently, Paul does not see himself in a class by himself.

Thinking about the passage:

Why would Paul so readily laud and call attention to others who minister to the Corinthians? What gives him such freedom to make much of others when it would be so easy to be concerned about how the Corinthians thought of him?

What do you see in Paul's words about others that encourages you as you think of others? What challenges you as you reflect on how you react to others? What prods you to speak about and support others in ways that you, perhaps, have not?