

## Jason Upchurch - 1 Corinthians 16:15-25 - 3 Final Exhortations

This morning we are ending our journey through 1 Corinthians. For some of you, this is the only book you've ever heard me preach on, and I assure you I know that there are actually other books in the Bible.

But And I hope this has been an encouraging study for all of us. I hope you've been challenged to work through difficult passages and yet comforted by the grace of God throughout.

As we look at this final section, I think we will also be encouraged as well. I think we can summarize these last verses into 3 simple sections:

1. Submit to your leaders.
2. Greet other believers.
3. Love the Lord.

So let's take a look.

### 1) Submit to your leaders. **Read 15-18**

So let me just say at the outset, anytime we touch on a passage that says "submit to your leaders" or something like that I cringe just a little bit inside because it feels self serving. Almost like preaching on giving to the church.

And I think part of that is because we could cite examples of abuse and egomaniacs who take this too far. Added to that in our western culture we are trained to mistrust authority on basically every level. Society wants kids to mistrust their parents, we don't trust the news media to tell us the truth about politicians, we don't trust politicians. People want to defund the police because they wield too much authority. And so on.

I'm not saying we should intrinsically trust all of these things, but I think you get the idea. Trusting authority and submitting to authority is very countercultural to a nation that was formed on rebelling against Britain which was not only the super power of the world, but ran by a tyrant. We've all got chips on our shoulder.

Add to that our own sinfulness loving our autonomy and its hard to submit.

But the reality is that God has built in authority structures when it comes to spiritual leadership since literally the dawn of time.

Before Moses, the patriarch of the family was really the spiritual patriarch as well. He led the family spiritually, hopefully to worship the one true and living God.

When God established the Law through Moses, the priests and Levites were used by God to judge the people, make sacrifices and give guidance and judge difficult situations.

We saw back in **1 Cor. 6** that even property and financial disputes should be dealt with between believers; mature believers arbitrating difficult situations. Paul says it's unthinkable that two Christians would go to pagans to settle disputes over money. What an embarrassment for the gospel. He assumes mature believers - elders - would have authority to judge simple financial matters.

But God has designed that his people submit to good spiritual leaders for their good and for his glory.

Here we are introduced to some people we know very little about. We first heard about Stephans all the way back in Chapter 1. Paul baptized the household of Stephans. It appears that that was noteworthy because his household was the first to come to faith in Jesus in Achaia. What's Achaia? Achaia was region of what we now know as southern Greece.

So just like Spokane is a city in the state of Washington, Corinth was a city in the province of Achaia. So this guy and his household were the first to come to faith in Jesus. Why submit to them?

Is he an elder? Are there other people in his family who are? We don't know for sure. Interestingly, there are no elders mentioned in Corinth, at least not by name or title. We have apostles coming in and out of the city, Timothy and others who are well known. But no one who is an elder by name or by title. It could be that Corinth lacked elders. It could be that Stephanas was an elder or just generally looked to as a leader of some kind. If I had to make a judgment call, I'd say he was probably an elder or elder in training of some kind. Why is that?

Well, because when it comes to who we submit to in the church there are basically 2 groups. First, generically, we submit to everyone.

**Look at Eph. 5:18-21.** Here we have Paul talking about our conduct in the church in general. We should be filled with the Spirit, that is to say we should be filled with the Word of God and obeying the Word of God. And our general demeanor toward people should be to submit to them. **Read 18-21**

Why do we submit to one another? Out of reverence for Christ. Remember that love does not insist on its own way, we can submit to other people as a way to serve them and give honor to Jesus.

**Phil. 2:3** Says that we do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significance than ourselves.

Most everything in life is temporary anyway, so we count other people more honorable than we are and submit to their desires

Christianity is not about who's top dog, it's not about who has the most power or influence although many people try to make it that. No, truly following Jesus is shown through simply submitting to one another as an act of love. So there's a generic sense in which our hearts should be geared to willingly place ourselves under other people because we love them.

The second time we see submission in relation to the church is in relation to leadership. **Look at Heb 13:17.** Here at the end of his letter, the author calls the elders "leaders." How do we know they are elders, because there's a shepherding aspect and an account that leaders will have to give that's mentioned here. **Read 17**

So here we have this obedience thing again along with submission to leaders. Why obey and submit to leaders? Well, because at least good leaders understand the weight of what they are doing when they guide the flock of God. The elders - leaders - are watching over souls.

I'm not making sure you have your best life now, or that you have a well-built portfolio, or that we have a satisfying snack time. I want to make sure that you're not going to hell, number 1. And number 2 that if you are a follower of Jesus that you are continually growing in your faith and growing in maturity.

That although the older you get the more the outer man is wasting away but that your inner man - your soul - is being renewed day by day. As elders that's our focus.

What I really care about is your soul and the souls of those in your household. I really care about your walk with Jesus.

That word to keep watch means to stay alert about possible dangers. It's the night watchman. It's the shepherd who looks out for wolves.

Why do I do this? Because I'm going to give an account to Jesus for how I've done my job. Every elder, every leader in Christ's church will give an account for how they watched over the souls of God's people.

Are there limits to this? Of course there are. If a leader is calling you to sin, you don't obey. If a leader is manipulative or openly sinful himself, you don't need to obey. And leaders are not above correction and rebuke. If a leader or leaders fall into sin, they must be dealt with in a Matt. 18 fashion. Those are all necessary.

But what God wants are leaders in your life in the church that are mutually encouraging the vast majority of the time. **Read 17**

You want happy leaders because that's an advantage to you. It's good. You ever been to a restaurant and the waiter has no joy? They're down or bummed or feel like maybe you're an intrusion? It kinda kills the whole atmosphere, doesn't it? Same thing in the church.

A few years ago my wife and I went to Olive Garden and had dinner with the absolute best waiter. The guy was top notch. He gave us suggestions and options, he was happy and helpful but not too intrusive. He genuinely wanted us to have a really nice time.

It was an advantage to us. And we to him.

And just like a waiter, leaders are primarily servant leaders. Jesus said whoever of you wishes to be the greatest will be the servant to all. Leaders, elders, in the church are not called to lord over their position over the sheep. We're not called to boss people around or burden them. We're called to serve them and encourage them to serve one another. We are called to serve the sheep in every way.

With all that, look back at **1 Cor. 16**. This is why I think Stephanas and those in his household are either some kind of leaders, elders in training or elders. But look how they're described. **Read 15-18**

Did you see what they devoted themselves to? The service of the saints. They are workers, laborers for the gospel. Laborers is κοπιῶν - to labor hard. These were hard working people in the church. And as such Paul says to submit to them. Follow their lead.

Look at one other aspect of these leaders. **Read 17-18**

Good leaders are refreshing to be around. It's sort of a play on concepts. Good leaders labor that we would be relieved from toil. Primarily refreshment in the Word of God.

But hopefully the vast majority of the time you feel encouraged or refreshed or spurred on in the Lord around the leadership at RBC. It shouldn't be a massive burden. It shouldn't be a dread to be around us. You shouldn't want to hide from us. We desire to serve you and encourage you and refresh you.

It's good to recognize those who do this well.

## 2) We Greet Other Believers. **Read 19-21**

This is really a heartwarming closing to this letter. Paul has been very direct and forward with this church for 16 chapters. But here, he wants them to understand that they're not the black sheep of the universal church. They're loved very much by other churches.

And so five times in 3 verses the word greet is used. And it's the idea of a happy greeting. Not just "Hey, I acknowledge you." No, it's like when you go on a trip to see a long time friend and they pick you up at the airport and you're excited to see each other. It's when your best friend from college drops by unexpectedly. It's a good thing, a happy thing.

All the churches throughout Asia send their greetings to Corinth. This isn't Asia as we know it - like China and India. In Paul's day that would be considered the Far East. The Asia Paul is referring to is in modern Day Turkey and Bulgaria and around the Black Sea. It was all the churches Paul had planted on his missionary journeys.

Aquila and Priscilla - the tent makers who were used by God in the conversation of Apollos - they send greetings. And generally everyone does.

Why does this matter? Because many times as a church we are suspicious of other churches. What do they believe? Are they okay? Is it okay to talk to them? What if they believe something weird?

And rather than warmly greet people that go to other churches, as a long time friends and family, we seek to figure out what differences we have and how we're better than they are. And I think it's instructive that after 16 chapters of correction, Paul says "by the way, every church in all of the Mediterranean Sea area greets you." They're part of the family of Christ.

"But what if they're charismatics?" Corinth was crazy Charismatic.

"What if they're one of those mega churches?" Corinth was probably a very large church.

"What if they have weird theology?" You mean weirder than getting drunk at communion or denying the resurrection or sleeping with prostitutes in the name of Christian liberty? Or eating dinner at pagan temples?

All the churches, and an apostle, still send greetings. They're not signing on to every practice. They're not patting their back on every theological problem. They're simply rejoicing in their common faith.

I think this is providentially instructive because next week we're going to be at church in the park next week with a half dozen other churches. Some of them believe differently than we do. That's okay.

We should still greet them. Love them, encourage them. Mingle with them and show them the love of Christ. Learn who they are and how they came to faith in Jesus. Be encouraged by them and encourage them.

And a lot of times when Christians get together from mixed churches we act like dogs who've just met each other for the first time at a park. We're sniffing each other, testing the limits, seeing if they're okay or now. There's no real greeting, certainly not an excited greeting. There's suspicion and doubt and awkwardness. "What if charismatics?" Or worse, Arminians?

Are they children of God through faith in Jesus? Then they are coheirs in Christ with us.

Now, what about this holy kiss at the end? **Read 20**

Now, if I'm honest I wanted to just sail past this and write it off. But that's not really honest with the text. I didn't do that with spiritual gifts or head coverings. We can't do that now.

But what I'm about to give you is a biblical theology of kissing. I kid you not. I'll build the whole case in a few minutes, but here's the bottom line:

Paul calls believers to greet each other with an affectionate kiss. Not a romantic kiss, but a friendly one. A holy one that is not sexual in any way but conveys close friendship. The kind of kiss you might give your sister or brother.

Now, none of you are going to do this anyway, so relax and listen. In my whole Christian life I've only had 3 Christians give me a kiss on the cheek as a way to greet me. These people were not my family. It was a little weird, but endearing at the same time. They had all spent a lot of time in Europe where a kiss on the cheek with friends is common.

So first of all this is a command. Greet is the command, the modifier is with a holy kiss.

This command is given all over the NT.

**Rom. 16:16:** Greet one another with a holy kiss.

**2 Cor. 13:12:** Greet one another with a holy kiss.

**1 Thess. 5:26:** Greet all the brothers with a holy kiss.

**1 Peter 5:14:** Greet one another with the kiss of love.

So this command is given to all different people, in different places, even by the apostle Peter.

There are more commands in the NT for greeting each other with a holy kiss of love than to wear head coverings, to take communion weekly, or be baptized before taking communion.

What's the background of this? If you want a fascinating study just look up the word kiss in a Strong's Concordance. And see who kisses who in the Bible.

Very rarely is kissing in the Bible an erotic thing that conveys sexual pleasure. There's a few verses in Song of Solomon where the husband and the wife are passionately kissing. And a verse or two in Proverbs warning against prostitutes who will allure men with kissing. And a couple others scattered throughout.

But vast, vast majority of verses that deal with kissing in the Bible are family and friends greeting each other. Or sending each other off.

Jacob kisses his father Isaac while pretending to be Esau (Gen 27:26-27)

Laban kisses his future son in law Jacob (Gen. 29:13)

Laban rebukes Jacob because he didn't get to kiss his grandkids goodbye. (Gen. 31)

Esau kisses Jacob when they meet up decades after Esau wanted to kill him. (Gen. 33:4)

Jospeh kisses his brothers when he reveals himself to them in Egypt (Gen 45)

Moses kisses Aaron. Moses also kisses Jethro.

Naomi kisses her daughter in laws Ruth and Oprah.

Samuel kisses Saul.

David kisses Jonathan. David kisses his Absalom. David kisses Barzillai the Gileadite.

Elisha asks to kiss his parents goodbye.

Psalm 2:12: Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish in the way,

for his wrath is quickly kindled. Blessed are all who take refuge in him - kissing is an act of reverence and worship.

The father kisses the Prodigal Son when he returns home.

Kruse: "apart from [a few] references...kissing in the OT is not about erotic love. It was a way too greeting or saying goodbye to a person, expressing reconciliation, acknowledging a familial relationship, paying homage, and acknowledging God's anointed." (Pg. 573)

Kissing was very much a Jewish thing to do. It was also seen in the greater Ancient Near Eastern area. Throughout the OT the pagans are condemned because they kiss their idols in worship.

In the NT, we also see kissing. Did you know that Jesus rebuked a Pharisee named Simon for *not* kissing him? Remember in Luke 7 when the woman comes and pours ointment on Jesus's feet and she wipes it off with her hair and she is kissing Jesus's feet. And the religious leaders are disgusted by this? Jesus says "I entered your house and you gave me no what? Kiss." You insulted me by not kissing me as a greeting. That would have been offensive. And Jesus praises the woman her for kissing his feet.

By the way, such a beautiful picture of worship, isn't it? She had probably met Jesus earlier that day and he forgave her, she's coming now to give him praise and worship and she's willing to praise him in the most humble, groveling way - on the floor kissing his feet and wiping them with her tears and hair despite people ridiculing her - because of his merciful salvation.

And of course we can't forget the most infamous, vile kiss in the entire Bible. Do you remember? It's when Judas betrays Jesus with what? A kiss. Judas uses the sign of friendly greeting to betray the Lord of glory fulfilling **Prov. 27:6**: faithful are the wounds of a friend; profuse are the kisses of an enemy.

So the vast majority of kissing in the Bible is greeting each other in a friendly, familial way. That seems to be what the apostles were encouraging. If we're really united into the family of God through Christ, then we'll treat each other like family. We'll greet those older than us in the Lord like we'd greet our parents. We'll greet our peers like we'd greet our own brothers and sisters.

In fact, in the very early church around 100 AD it seems that a holy kiss was part of the church service. Almost like the meet and greet is part of church services. Can you imagine that? Everyone stand up and kiss the people around you. Not gonna happen.

Now, we need to ask ourselves: do we really kiss each other? It seems like this is something the people of God have done throughout the ages to convey friendly camaraderie amongst family members.

The Bible talks about loving all people, but especially showing favor and grace and kindness and affection to other believers.

We shake hands with unbelievers. We even hug unbelievers. Fist bumps, high fives.

There is something about physical hugs or embrace or even a familial kiss that conveys more than just formal acknowledgement.

I mean, imagine your daughter came home to visit after not seeing her for a year. And rather than hug or kiss her, you stuck out your hand to shake hands. That would cold.

What do we do? have no idea. It's not any weirder now than it was then, which is why Paul has keep telling people to do it. If it was just fine culturally, it wouldn't need to be commanded 5 times.

I'll be honest, I'm not sure I'm ready to kiss you guys. I looked up what John MacArthur had to say about this passage and he said "Maybe this is something we need to get back to doing." I think he might be right. We should have more than just formal affection for each other; it should be deep familiar affection.

So we submit to leaders, greet one another.

### 3) We love the Lord. Read 21-24

Why does Paul say he signs this with his own hand? He probably had an amanuensis write most of the letter. And amanuensis was a professional scribe whose job it was to write documents in a legible manner. So there was a professional scribe writing down Paul's words that were given to him by the work of the Holy Spirit.

But in most letters, the very last greeting was actually written down by the author himself. So these last words were originally penned by Paul in his own handwriting.

And he ends the letter with love. First, as a threat. **Read 22**

That's a threat. If someone doesn't love the Lord, let them be accursed. Literally, let them be anathema. Cursed by God forever. Ultimately in hell.

Why is that? Well, what's the greatest commandment? To love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength. That's command number one. And if someone has no love for the Lord, they are cursed by him.

Let me say, there are a lot of people who view God as this sort of heart broken teenager who just wants the cute girl to like him. He's called the hound of heaven and the gentleman just knocking on your heart waiting and hoping you came to faith.

That's not how it works. All unbelievers have no love for the Lord. And they are enemies of God and God of them. They are under the wrath of God and sentenced by God to torment forever and ever.

A lot of people will say "Well, if you don't believe in Jesus you'll spend an eternity away from God." To which many people say "Good, I don't want to be around your God anyway."

But the Bible is clear that if someone doesn't love the Lord, it's not like God ignores them or just avoids them. They are accursed by God forever.

It's only through faith in the risen Christ - who took our curse for us - that we are saved from the wrath of God. Only through faith in Jesus that we go from being cursed by God to being eternally blessed by God.

And when you are eternally blessed by God you want Jesus to come! **Read 22**

Come Lord Jesus because the curse is gone. And we want the fullness of blessing to begin. When someone repents from their sin and turns to faith in Christ their longing should be to see Jesus as soon as possible.

And I can't think of a better way to end this letter than with grace and love. **Read 23-24**

Paul reminds them of grace of Jesus toward them. It's really a prayer wish where Paul is praying that the grace of Jesus would be toward them.

And he reminds them of his love in Christ toward them as well.

What a sweet letter. What a great admonition for us to leave on.

And I can do no better than Paul to end this letter. **Read 23-24**