

1 Corinthians 16:12-24

Introduction

In the second half of this closing chapter, Paul looks at some other aspects of Christian life. He gives some precepts about Christian living, tells us something about the people who made up the early church, and reminds us of the prospect of the glory before us.

Precepts about Christian living

Paul gives five clear and important commands. He writes with a military background in mind. As a commander he is giving orders to the soldiers under his authority. **Be on your guard** (1 Corinthians 16:13). Like a sentry, be alert, keep your eyes open so you will know when the enemy will strike next. **Stand firm in the faith.** When under attack, do not give an inch. Hold the line; do not let the enemy through. Be stable and firmly grounded. Dig your heels in and do not compromise the Gospel.

**Be men of courage.** Do not be childish. Grow up and behave like mature Christians. You are in a desperate fight with evil and unseen hosts of wickedness. The words of Bishop Latimer as he burned at the stake, “Be of good cheer, Master Ridley, and play the man.” **Be strong.** Not that the Christian is strong in himself, but he is strong in the Lord. Like a well-trained, well-disciplined and well-equipped soldier, be strong to fight for God.

Then after these four military style commands comes the fifth command on a well-mentioned theme – **Do everything in love** (1 Corinthians 16:13). Paul always emphasises this subject, he dealt with it in depth in ch.13. It was so relevant to a church like Corinth with its jealousies, party divisions, cliques and selfishness.

Later on he speaks of the holy kiss (1 Corinthians 16:20; also found in Romans 16:16; 1 Thessalonians 5:26; 1 Peter 5:14), a sign of love between fellow believers, carried on for some while in the church in Paul and Peter’s day. Commonly placed after the prayers and before the Lord’s Table, it came to be called “the peace”. Sometimes on the hand rather than on the lips. Its use gradually faded because it was liable to abuse and misinterpretation by heathen slanderers. It also faded as the church grew in size, from little house churches to vast congregations.

Should we reintroduce it? It is observed very literally in France. Local culture has to be taken into account. Among Bible teaching of permanent importance there are also things which were applicable to a particular culture. In the East, then and now, greeting is expressed by a kiss. In the West, we use a handshake for the same thing. So to introduce the holy kiss in our culture is not wise or helpful spiritually. The main emphasis is on love, friendship and warmth. There is no place for coldness, aloofness and cliquishness. A church that is a collection of strangers, or at best acquaintances, is not a true church in the deep sense of the term.

So Paul's closing commands to the church are that they must be firm and resolute in face of the evil outside the church, but be loving and warm-hearted within the church.

### People who made up the early church

Now we get some very interesting pictures of members of the early church. Who were they? What were they like? What can we learn from them?

**The household of Stephanus were the first converts in Achaia, and they have devoted themselves to the service of the saints** (1 Corinthians 16:15). This, the first family to be converted, were shining examples, giving themselves to serve and minister to other Christians. **They refreshed my spirit and yours also. Such men deserve recognition** (1 Corinthians 16:18). They are worthy of respect, and we need to help and cooperate with them because of the quality of their work and the kind of example they set.

Respect comes not from the title by which we are called or the office we hold, but from the quality of our work and life. It has to be earned and won because of the kind of person and service we render. A minister in a church cannot command a church to respect him, but he can earn their respect by proving himself to be trustworthy, producing work of good quality, and setting a good example.

Then Paul mentions some other people who hold honoured place in the New Testament. **Aquila and Priscilla greet you warmly in the Lord, and so does the church that meets in their house** (1 Corinthians 16:19). This couple were Jews, and like Paul they were tent-makers by trade. They had been expelled from Rome by Emperor Claudius. They met up with Paul and remained closely attached to him, willing even to risk their lives for him (Romans 16:4,6). Later on they moved back to Rome. They are mentioned 6 times, and 4 of those times Priscilla's name comes first. Was she the more able and gifted? There is a theory that they wrote Hebrews, Priscilla doing the major part, hence Hebrews is anonymous because a woman was mainly responsible!

But they worked well as a team and made an enormous contribution to the life of the early church. They were not great public speakers, evangelists, or preachers in public view, but they worked behind the scenes and did enduring work using their home and hospitality.

One visitor to their home was the Alexandrian Jew, Apollos (1 Corinthians 16:12), an eloquent man, mighty in the Scriptures, fervent in spirit, who expounded the way of God more perfectly because of his limited knowledge (Acts 18:24ff). Having heard Apollos, Aquilla and Priscilla invited him into their home. Their home was always at the disposal of the Lord and the Gospel. Twice we read of the church in their house (Romans 16:5; 1 Corinthians 16:19). There were no church buildings until the third century, so congregations met in private houses where the rooms were big enough. There must have been countless Aquillas and Priscillas. What a blessing when husband and wife are at one in the things of the Lord, and work together and help one another in Christian work, using their home in the cause of the Gospel. These homes become centres of Christian light and love, where Christ is the unseen but ever present guest. A haven of rest and peace to those in need.

Christian homes are the backbone of any church. Is the Christian home the key to evangelism? In the eighteenth century, it was the open-air meeting. In the nineteenth century it was church services and evangelistic rallies. But is homes the best means nowadays? Our lives are now more home-centred. They are more attractive and pleasant than the cold houses of the past. Could homes not again be the centre of evangelism and outreach and up building, as they were in the first and second centuries?

### Prospect of glory before us

So the letter concludes as Paul takes the pen from the amanuensis to write the last words. **If anyone does not love the Lord – a curse be on him. Come on Lord** (1 Corinthians 16:22). (The AV translates this greeting “Maranatha”, the Aramaic for “Come o Lord.”)

This great epistle ends on the subject of the Lord’s return. It is the longing of Paul’s heart and that of the early Christians, as it should be ours – the longing for the Lord’s return in glory. The penultimate verse in the Bible comes to mind, **Even so, come, Lord Jesus** (Revelation 22:20). Corinthians ends on this thought, and so does the Bible. It should be the longing of every Christian heart. There is not much in this world. The future is not bright wherever you look. Easy to get pessimistic. This ought not to surprise us. But what a change will take place when the Lord returns.

*“Our Lord is now rejected  
And by the world disowned.  
By the many still neglected  
And by the few enthroned.  
But soon He’ll come in glory,  
The hour is drawing nigh,  
For crowning day is coming  
By and by.”*

Those without Christ and the glorious prospect of His return are poor-minded and to be pitied. They have nothing.

When Napoleon was in exile in Elba, there was a great longing for his return among the people of France, but they dared not speak openly of their hope. Therefore they used a violet as a significant sign. The violet is a flower which speaks of spring after the darkness of winter, so they wore violets on their coats and dresses. They would greet each other with “Do you love the violet?” and in this way they said nothing, yet said everything. Those looking forward to Napoleon’s return wore the violet. It was the password, communicating their longing and sharing their longing with others. Napoleon did return to lead them, though alas for him it ended in defeat at Waterloo. He was finally banished to St. Helena and died later.

When the longing of our hearts is realized, and Christ returns, it will be to victory. Do you love the Lord’s return? **Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day**

**– and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing** (2 Timothy 4:8). Maranatha – Come, O Lord!

### Conclusion

We must heed the principles to be watchful, stand firm, courageous and strong, and love one another. All our possessions, including our homes, should be at the Lord's disposal. We need to constantly keep an eye on Christ's return. We must love it, long for it, be ready for it, and expect it at any moment.