

## **WARM-HEARTED PEOPLE**

### **1 Corinthians 16:5–24**

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Today we come to the close of the first Corinthian letter. It's taken us a long time to journey through it. As with most of Paul's letters, Paul closes with some personal remarks. He talks about people who are close to him. And things that are on his heart.

I once had a professor who taught a course on evangelism. The course organization and the lecture content were poor. It was common talk in the class—how poor the content was and the organization. But everyone loved the professor; the professor was one of the most warm-hearted persons I've had the opportunity to meet in my life. We went away from his class saying this about it, "After all, evangelism is better caught than taught anyway." That somehow handled all the problems we'd had on the course content. This particular professor modeled and represented what evangelism was all about—loving people and caring about them, and caring about Jesus. I believe that the principle of "better caught than taught" is a valid principle that applies to Christian life and it applies to this church. We could have the most orthodox theology in the world, and it doesn't mean a thing, because when it comes right down to it, the Christian life is better caught than it is taught. We can have the grandest and most beautifully appointed facilities, but it doesn't mean anything unless what we have among us is catchable and infectious. We can have the grandest liturgy of worship and the most marvelous appointments that relate to a worship service, but unless what we have is catching, it is no good. We must be a people in which love and caring and courtesy are present. If you ever feel that this body of believers is not loving and caring, then begin to reach out and love and care yourself, because the best way to bring it about is to do it.

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Here, in this Scripture today, we have people set before us who are not so much teaching us the Christian life as letting us catch it by seeing who they are and what they represent.

#### **I. Brother Paul was such a person. I'd call him firm and flexible.**

“After I go through Macedonia, I will come to you—for I will be going through Macedonia.

Perhaps I will stay with you awhile, or even spend the winter, so that you can help me on my journey, wherever I go. I do not want to see you now and make only a passing visit; I hope to spend some time with you, if the Lord permits. But I will stay on at Ephesus until Pentecost,

because a great door for effective work has opened to me, and there are many who oppose me”

(1 Corinthians 16:5–10, NIV).

When I was a young Christian, I read Paul's letters. I must confess I did not like Paul. He's difficult to understand, confusing. He's just beyond my reach. I always thought of him as a very cold, impersonal individual. How your attitudes change over the years! To see this person as the most warmhearted person—he represents a person, to me, who is firm and flexible.

One of the things I have caught from his lifestyle, not so much from his teaching but from reading about his lifestyle in the New Testament, is that he is a person who was a goal-oriented person. He had a strategy for living. He always had a strategy. When he goes into a town for the first time to bring the gospel of Jesus Christ, you know exactly where he's going to go because he has a goal, a strategy. He's going to go right to the synagogue, where God has linked up with his people for centuries, and he's going to bring them the good news that builds upon the revelation they've had in the past, and seek to bring converts right there.

You know where he's going to go when you watch him travel geographically. He's always going to go to the key, major population center. Not to some town in the boondocks somewhere, but to

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a place where there was a crossroads of commerce and education. Because if he could reach that hub of the wheel, then the gospel will radiate outwards in spokes. He is goal-oriented.

Simultaneously, though, he could be sensitive to change. As you watch him in these few verses that I have just shared with you this morning, you see him making certain statements about his plans. He's going to Macedonia, in northern Greece. He's coming to Corinth. He's staying at Ephesus until the feast of Pentecost. He is going to Jerusalem ultimately with the offering. But he's, on the other hand, flexible. He doesn't know how long he's going to spend with the Corinthians. We do know that, when he finally gets to Corinth, he decides at that point that some later time he's going to go to Rome.

Paul is a model of firmness and flexibility as an individual, who shares with us that life is well lived. If we can develop target goals, know where we want to be led, where the Lord is guiding us. If we can be ever open to the Lord's will, so we are susceptible to change as the Lord indicates. I like what the older believers that I grew up with all my life have said. They said, "I'm going to such and such a place, 'If the Lord wills.'" You don't hear that as often today. I think we ought to be saying it—"If the Lord wills."

He depended upon other believers for help. Continually, he was looking for assistance. He was not a lone ranger in his Christian lifestyle. We cannot be either. He was sensitive to circumstances. He said, "I'm staying at Ephesus till Pentecost." Pentecost was the end of dangerous sailing on the Mediterranean. So he was really saying, "I'll stay until the weather gets better." He's sensitive to circumstances.

I think, too, he's at Ephesus because he's mindful of an opportunity. "A great and effective door is set before me [an open door], but with that opportunity there are many adversaries [or opponents or dangers]" (1 Corinthians 6:9). Somehow, I think that in our own living, as we catch

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the apostle's lifestyle, we've got to look at every open door that the Lord gives us. There are going to be adversaries, opponents with that open door. If we only see the open door opportunity and don't see the adversary waiting there, then we have underestimated at the start. When we get into the adversities, we'll be unprepared to see things through, because we only saw how easy things would be and how ripe things would be for the picking, and didn't notice that there were adversities.

On the other hand, if we see adversities through the open door, we'll never begin, because we're so discouraged by looking at all the things we have to surmount that we might just never get out on our journey. But the Scripture teaches us, in looking at open doors in our life, to see the open door with the adversity, to not let the adversity hold us short but to reckon that the adversity is there.

At one time in Paul's life, Ephesus had been a closed door (Acts 16). God had a reason for it. But now it was open. Inside the door there was heathenism, idolatry, superstition, demon possession, religious prejudice, occult, immorality—incredible kinds of things. But Paul saw, through all of that, a people whom God was beginning to call after His name. In the queen city of what was then the Roman province of Asia, he saw, with the adversity, an opportunity.

I think Paul would have felt this way, and I sometimes feel this way—like the cat who fell into the pail of milk. He cried out, “O, for a capacity equal to my opportunity!” An open door with many adversaries. Firm and flexible.

### **II. Another brother whom we catch the Christian life from is Timothy.**

“If Timothy comes, see to it that he has nothing to fear while he is with you, for he is carrying on the work of the Lord, just as I am. No one, then, should refuse to accept him. Send him on his way in peace so that he may return to me. I am expecting him along with the brothers” (1

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Corinthians 16:10–11, NIV). Timothy, we know, was from the Galatian town of Lystra, where Paul evangelized on his first missionary journey. His mother and his grandmother were Jewish. His father was Greek. Into his town one day, perhaps, when Timothy was a teenager, Paul the apostle came. Two great things happened in Timothy's hometown when the apostle Paul came. One great thing was, a man who had been crippled from birth was instantly healed. The second momentous event that happened is that, shortly after the healing, religious prejudice worked against Paul, and he was taken outside the town and left for dead after having been pelted with stones.

Two great things at Lystra—a healing and a stoning. I am of the persuasion that Timothy saw both. I think that somehow, in that one instance, he saw the two dimensions of the Christian life, the fact that God breaks through and works miracles which are beyond our understanding and bring great glory and praise in our hearts. But the second side is that there are danger and risks and there are things about serving God that perplex us. Why didn't the person who had the same power to heal the man crippled from birth have the power to invoke an invisible plastic shield around him, so that when the stones came banging his way, they'd fall harmlessly at his feet? Why doesn't God turn stones into marshmallows? It'd make it a whole lot easier.

Timothy saw both in Paul's personality. I think one attracted him as much as the other. He saw how God operates in power, but he saw how a Christian faces adversity and does it triumphantly and doesn't give up or lose heart. Serving God is not always the magic key that turns everything our way, but many times, prayer prevails with God, and other times, God gives us the grace to go through something. Timothy saw this and shortly after this, on Paul's next missionary journey, he came back. Timothy was serving the Lord and was well spoken of by the brethren in his area, and Paul said to Timothy, "Come be with me" and for the next twenty years they labored in

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missionary service together. He was Paul's most trusted and nearest aide, I think, of all the aides Paul had. Timothy could always be counted upon. Yet he was a shy and kind of retiring sort of person. I'd call him steady and sensitive. There is a place in the body of Christ for leadership of that body of people, who have a quiet temperament like Timothy's. Timothy was unassuming. He did not force his way to the front and yet he was in a place of leadership in the church. Sometimes, we falsely think that only if you have a dynamic personality and effervescence, can you belong in a leadership position. Paul probably had that, but Timothy did not. Timothy was quiet and reserved by nature. Yet God had a very key spot for him in leadership.

I can never forget what Dr. Frost said years ago. He's a very quiet, unassuming kind of person. He was once commenting on the fact that he'd been thinking there were many animals in the zoo—the ferocious tiger and ravenous lion. Along with these animals, there is also the little bunny rabbit which doesn't roar out of its den, but at the first sign of adversity, it kind of skitters away in the opposite direction. He said, "For years I wanted God to give me a lion or tiger personality, so that when I was introduced as the guest for the day, I'd come roaring up to the pulpit and be the lion and roar out God's message. But alas, I have come to accept the fact that God has made me as a bunny rabbit in His kingdom. There's a place for bunny rabbits in the kingdom of God."

Timothy—this marvelous person, who did the Lord's work without receiving a lot of fanfare—had a shy and quiet nature. Paul says that the responsibility of the body of Christ towards such a one is to welcome, receive, encourage, and reach out and assist that person.

**III. Another brother who is a warm-hearted person in this closing part of Corinthians is Apollos.**

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“Now about our brother Apollos: I strongly urged him to go to you with the brothers. He was quite unwilling to go now, but he will go when he has the opportunity” (1 Corinthians 16:12, NIV). What had happened was that, way back in 1 Corinthians 1, we saw the Corinthian church was divided into four denominations. The Paul denomination, the Apollos denomination, the Peter denomination and those who said, “We don’t belong to any man. We belong to Christ”—the Christian denomination. Paul evidently wanted Apollos to go to Corinth, to let the Apollos party know that they shouldn’t be following Apollos, they should be following Christ. Apollos, Paul says, chose not to go. He said, “I wanted him to go, but he didn’t go and he’ll come whenever he’s willing and has the opportunity.”

This is a striking kind of a text. It tells us that Apollos, who we know was a teachable person (when we first find him in Scripture, Aquila and Priscilla took him aside and taught him the way of God more accurately. He was teachable.), here appears to be tenacious. Paul says, “I want you to do this,” and he says, “I’m not going to do it.” You would think that Paul would pull rank. You would think that he would say, “I am Paul the apostle, and Apollos, you will go where I send you!” But none of this. You might have thought Paul would lay a submission trip on him. “Apollos, your standing with Jesus Christ is directly dependent upon your being submitted to my leadership. If you are not submitted to my leadership, then you cannot belong to Jesus Christ. So now, either submit or be outside the body.”

You know there are people in the body of Christ actually saying that. I had someone in the church come to me that had gone to a group that was teaching submission so strong that they, in effect, said she had to obey the leader or she would be outside the kingdom. The New Testament doesn’t know anything about that kind of stuff.

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The New Testament knows something about an inner dependence among believers and about actual submission. But the New Testament knows nothing about a kind of leadership philosophy whereby I vacate my responsibility before God for decisions and lay that on someone else. I'm responsible to God for my decisions as a priest. Jesus said, "Call no man master" (Matthew 23:8). We're all brothers. Sure, there's authority. Sure, there's hierarchy. But sure also there's individual priesthood before God. Apollos modeled that kind of tenacious person that, unless God told him to do it, he wasn't going to do it. That wasn't out of a rebellious heart. Not out of stubbornness. It wasn't because he wanted to be defiant and prove that he was equal to Paul. But honestly in his spirit he did not feel that God wanted him to do it. So he didn't do it. The tremendous thing was that Paul respected his freedom and said, "Ok brother, whenever you're willing." That's the way it ought to be in the church of Jesus Christ.

I think leadership at times can only suggest, only feel "this is the direction God's laid on our heart." But they should wait for the confirmation of other believers. Other believers must sense it as well, if the direction is going to come to pass. Teachable, but tenacious. What qualities to have in our life. What twins to have alongside of us! To be pliable in our heart, but to be tenacious when we feel God's shared with us something.

**IV. Then Paul also addresses the church of Corinth with these words "Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be men of courage; be strong. Do everything in love" (1 Corinthians 16:13, NIV).**

Here he's telling the church at Corinth to be careful, courageous, and compassionate. The reason why he must tell them "Be on your guard" is that there are many people seeking to infiltrate the body with doctrines and lifestyles that are not like Christ. That's not just Corinth—that's Newport Mesa Christian Center! Practically every week something comes by my desk to

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infiltrate this body with some group or methodology or whatever. I want to be open to what the Lord is doing, but also be on my guard. And I want the church to be on its guard, to not receive everything that comes along as though it comes in the name of Christ, because it doesn't. Be on your guard, stand firm in the faith. Be courageous, be strong. Also, reach out and be compassionate and loving. Can you be watchful and not be suspicious? Can you be concerned for truth and not always be suspecting that someone's going to pull one on you? How can you balance those things? That's what Paul is admonishing the Corinthians to do, to keep these things in balance, to be guarding, but not to be suspicious of everyone's motives.

### **V. Brother Stephanas.**

“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, to submit to such as these and to everyone who joins in the work, and labors at it. I was glad when Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus arrived, because they have supplied what was lacking from you” (1 Corinthians 16:15–17, NIV). As Paul was lacking the fellowship of the Corinthian church, when these three brothers showed up, they supplied what he lacked—fellowship. “For they refreshed my spirit and yours also.” Such men deserve recognition. Stephanas: available and addicted. Why “addicted”? The word in verse 15 is “he devoted himself to the service of the saints.” And the word “devoted” is the same word as “addicted.” “Addicted to the saints in their service,” the body of Christ needs people who are addicted to the ministry and the body. They have moved to number one priority, other than serving God and being related to their family, they have moved right up to the top of their priority list, being addicted to serving the saints. I want us to be addicted to the ministry of the saints. What a tremendous thing to be involved in, caring for other people in Christ's body. Stephanas represented that kind of work, as did the associates with him.

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#### **VI. Then Paul brings greetings from brothers and sisters who are elsewhere in Christ.**

“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 [wherever you read of Aquila and Priscilla, you’ll find a church meeting at their house]. All the brothers here send you greetings. Greet one another with a holy kiss” (1 Corinthians 16:19–20, NIV). Aquila and Priscilla, of course, are known to the Corinthians because, after they had left Rome, they lived at Corinth and later they moved to Ephesus, where Paul is writing this letter from. They later moved back to Rome. They are people who traveled. Wherever they went, they linked up with the body of Christ.

Ours is a day in which people move rapidly and get dislocated easily. It’s so easy when you’re dislocated every two or three years to begin leaving off building ties in the body of Christ, and not seek these deeper associations of caring and ministry. One of the beautiful things about Aquila and Priscilla is that they’re models for Southern Californians: no matter how often they moved, wherever they went, they re-established those ties that were so integral to ministry and fellowship. They committed themselves to the body of Christ. Paul says, “Greetings from them and greetings from all the saints that are in Asia,” the province of which Ephesus is the capital. He even says, as part of our way of giving our greetings to you, “Greet one another with a holy kiss.”

Do you believe, if the Scripture says something one time by way of command, that it’s important? Or twice? Five times in Scripture, “greet one another with a holy kiss”? Why is that important? Now you dismiss the service and everybody splits for the doors. It takes time to build community. The body of Jesus Christ is not just something which we come into and park ourselves for 1 hour, 1 hour and 15 minutes, and then don’t relate to the people that are around

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us. There needs to be communion. That begins at an elemental level of greeting, greeting that gets you close to a person. “Greet one another with a holy kiss.” Underline “holy.”

That’s a cultural command. You can substitute it with “a hearty hug,” or “a healthy handshake.”

But whatever you substitute it with, greeting is important in the body of Christ. It’s a way of unifying the body and showing one another that we care. I’m amazed, again and again, at how many people come into churches and say, “I was in that church and nobody said hello to me.

Nobody welcomed me. Nobody shook my hand.” I’ve had people come to this church, and I just want to crawl under the carpet somewhere if someone tells me that about this church. I never like to believe anything bad about this church.

The antidote is this command—five times—an obligation that is upon you every time you’re in the body of Christ, “Greet one another with a holy kiss,” that’s an obligation, a scriptural obligation. It’s binding, and if you’re going to be a Christian, you don’t have an option.

Paul closes, “I, Paul, write this greeting in my own hand” (verse 21, NIV). As many of those letters, he’s dictated the letter and at the end, he seizes the pen and writes in his own handwriting, at the very end. “I, Paul, write this greeting in my own hand. If anyone does not love the Lord—a curse be on him. Come, O Lord! The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you. My love to all of you in Christ Jesus. Amen” (1 Corinthians 16:21–24, NIV). Strange conclusion. “If anyone does not love the Lord, anathema,” is the literal word he uses. Then he turns right around in a play on words and says “maranatha.” Here, in these two words at the close, Paul presents the case before us of warm heart devotion to Jesus Christ. “If anyone does not love the Lord, anathema.”

Who’s included in this? Does this mean Paul, with a stroke of the pen, is consigning to hell all the rest of Corinth, that weren’t in the church? Is this the way he’s ending the letter? “Anathema”

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means to be devoted to destruction. To be doomed. Paul, all along, has not been writing the city of Corinth. He's been writing the church at Corinth, we have seen—if we've paid attention to the details of this letter—that one of the real problems at Corinth, and perhaps the thing that's explained in so many of its divisions, was lack of love for Jesus Christ.

I think this is a warning to persons naming the name of Jesus Christ that had no idea of what it really meant on the inside to be a Christian. Who found it convenient to be involved in this new group, but didn't really understand what commitment to Jesus Christ was all about. Paul says that the acid test is love of the Lord. "If you don't the Lord, anathema." Doomed to destruction. I'm not so sure if, at this point, he's saying "doomed to destruction" from the standpoint that what you represent in your life is for nothing, and on the day of judgment, when everything that you have accumulated around you is tested by fire, there's going to be nothing left but your own life. Or if he means "doomed to hell." I kind of think it's the first and not the latter.

But what he's saying is, "If you do not have the love of Jesus Christ central in your life, everything that you are working for and living for and waiting for really doesn't mean anything. It's all coming to destruction." It's coming to an end. "Anathema"—it's cursed. And you may very well be cursed in the process.

But then he comes right away with a balancing word—"Maranatha"—this is an Aramaic word for "Our Lord has come," a recognition of the fact that Jesus Christ has already appeared in our midst, and it can mean "Our Lord comes," which puts it in the future. It can mean "Our Lord has come" which means Christ is present with us now. It can mean, as a prayer, "Come, O Lord."

We don't know exactly what Paul had in mind when he uses the word here. It's possible he meant all the phases that the verb is capable of having. But a continual reminder among Christians is the fact that Jesus has come. And that Jesus is coming. We shouldn't look at the

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word “maranatha” as just some word used for the future, “The Lord is coming,” but we should always look at the word “maranatha” and say, “Our Lord has already come, and our Lord is present now.” “Wherever two or three are gathered in his name there he is in the midst”

(Matthew 18:20). So the antidote to anathema is a recognition of the presence of the Lord.

“Maranatha”—the Lord has come.

“The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you. My love to all of you in Christ Jesus” (1 Corinthians 16:23-24, NIV). Isn’t it beautiful that the letter closes with grace? If ever people needed grace, it’s the Corinthian church. If ever there was a group of people that needed to grow in the Lord, it was the Corinthians. Thank God that, in the midst of our need for growth, God gives us His grace. Though we haven’t quite performed up to the standards that He knows we’re capable of and we know we’re capable of, at the same time, God sends us His love. God doesn’t withhold His love until we’ve matched His standard of 100 percent perfection. He sends us His love while we were yet sinners. He sent us His love while we were yet imperfect in our walk of grace—God’s grace and God’s love.

Therefore, I think the closing words that Paul gives to the Corinthians are also what He gives to us. “God’s grace and God’s love is for you.”

### **Closing Prayer**

We thank You, Lord, for the weeks and months and even year that we have shared together in his letter. For the fact that we have learned anew that Your Word is living and it quickens. It teaches, it warns, it counsels, it guides. Again today, Lord, Your Word has come to us, your Word has spoken to us about the fact that there may be glaciers in our own heart, icy places of reserve, not open to You or to others. Lord, we pray anew for Your presence to enter us in such a way that we will be the warm-hearted people You want us to be—respecting the style of personality

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You've called us to. Respecting the fact that some of us are more outgoing than others. At the same time, Lord, within that uniqueness of each one of us, You're calling us to new levels of commitment, new levels of love, new levels of relationship, new levels of caring about You and Your body. Help us to be the kind of people from whom the gospel is not only taught, but from whom Jesus Christ is caught, we ask. Amen.