

# Addicted to Loving Jesus and His Church – 1 Corinthians 16:15-24

**Introduction** – Someone once said that as you look around this world full of so many gifts, remember that only two things will remain forever: The Word of God and people. Paul was addicted to loving the two things that last forever and urges the church to follow him as he closes his letter. These last verses are not a list of rote sayings strung together to end a long letter. They are full of passion, valuable to meditate over and then imitate, and by God's grace, infect us with the same obsessive addictions.

**Overview of the Text** – Paul urges the Corinthians to submit to the leadership of Stephanas whose household were the firstfruits in Corinth and who have been devoted to the ministry of the saints in Corinth (vv14-16) along with all the other leadership who works and labors with them (v16). Paul had his eye on the penetration of the gospel throughout the Roman province of Achaia and he believed the work begun was only the beginning of a further harvest. The three men who brought the letter and questions to Paul provided great refreshment to him as though it was from the whole church and should be honored for it (vv17-18). The love and greeting of churches in Asia are sent, along with specific individuals who had previously served in Corinth (v19) - in fact, all the brethren greet them (v20). In the same way, all in Corinth should be reconciled and demonstrate it with a holy kiss (v20b). In a concluding paragraph, the author's own handwriting demonstrates his seal of approval on the letter and his own responsibility over its contents (v21). The enemies of Christ are warned (v22), a benediction of grace is bestowed (v23), and Paul's personal love for them in Christ Jesus accompanies it all (v24).

**Holy Addictions** – The AV reads “*they have addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints*” (v15). They are like Paul whose letter is filled with hard words and warnings but in the context of love for them (4:14, 10:14, 15:58). Paul loves God and the Word of His God and so he will not compromise the truth. He also loves the people in Corinth and so will not compromise his commitment to them. And the whole letter has focused on the same – living in a truth-filled community, standing against contentions and factions (ch1, 3), demanding and honoring sexual purity and church discipline (ch 5, 6, 7), using spiritual gifts for the edification of the body (ch 12, 14) and so on – but all of this with love (ch 13). These devotions (addictions) drove Stephanas and others to the ministry (the word is “*deacon*”) of the saints. They are servants, and in an interesting twist, Paul says that the Corinthians should submit to servants like that (16:16). In the kingdom of God, servants are granted authority through their devoted submission to the Word of God and their devoted service to the saints (Mark 9:35).

**Greetings To and From Churches and the Brethren** – Greetings are signs and seals of devotion, reconciliation, peace, partnership, and love. They can be sent through others (and so Paul receives such from Corinth through Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus - vv17-18). Paul sends the same back to Corinth from all the churches in Asia (v19); our reconciliation with Christ brings brotherhood, fellowship, and familial love to one another even if we don't know them personally.

But especially with those who have personally ministered to and with us, there is a deep bond. Aquila and Priscilla, their lives intersected and intertwined with Paul's. Like Paul, they were tentmakers (Acts 18:1-3). Expelled from Rome because Aquila was a Jew, they met Paul in Corinth. They travelled with Paul to Ephesus when he established the church there (Acts 18:18) and Paul left them there to oversee the ministry when he returned to Antioch. When Apollos came to Ephesus, it was Priscilla and Aquila who “*explained the way of God more accurately,*” (Acts 18:24-28) empowering his ministry. Later, when Paul writes to the church in Rome, they are back serving in that church (Rom 16:3-4) and Paul mentions that at one point they had risked their own lives to save him.

Of course, Paul has stressed the need throughout 1 Corinthians for members of that church to be reconciled, and so he charges them to “*greet one another with a holy kiss*” (v20). The kiss expressed not merely friendship, but especially reconciliation and peace (Gen 33:4, 45:15, 2 Sam 14:33, Luke 15:20). Whether in a form of liturgical tradition or not, our greetings ought to be full of affection and holiness.

Ministry thrives when servants like Paul, couples like Aquila and Priscilla, and households like Stephanas' love God and His people. Ministry thrives when servants of the Lord truly love one another and display that reconciling fellowship. Our devotion to Christ is to be all consuming (Deut 6:4-6) and Jesus said so (Matt 10:37, John 8:42, John 14:15, 21, 23, John 21:15, 2 Cor 5:14-15, 1 Pet 1:8).

**Sentiments in Tension** – Deep love and dire cursing. Like a father protecting his daughter (2 Cor 11:2), a holy jealousy brings out both in Paul as he closes the letter with his own hand. In the Covenant of Grace there are the real results of obedience and disobedience. Obedience deepens the blessings and disobedience or infidelity brings a curse. To those (and I believe Paul is addressing particularly those in the church) who do not have this addictive love, Paul calls on God to damn them (*anathema* – v22) and then calls for the coming of the Lord (*marana-tha*) in such judgment/protection. “*Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, And you perish in the way, When His wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all those who put their trust in Him*” (Psalm 2:12). Jesus Christ is that Son, the promised King, and He brings blessing to all who take refuge in Him. But to those who refuse to give Him their loyal love and obedience, and especially to those who harm His bride, all that is left for them is the curse of destruction – a destruction that will come upon “*all rule, authority, and power*” wielded against His kingdom (15:24). The church is a gracious and glorious refuge for true sheep; it is a terrible hideout for the hypocrite.

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