

1 Corinthians 16:12-24 The Resurrection Bond Falls Ch. AM 9/8/2024

Here Paul was concluding his letter, getting very practical, and talking about future plans, and was exchanging greetings. It might seem that we are completing our sermon series in order to be thorough, but that we are reading housekeeping matters intended for an ancient church. In what ways is this passage helpful to us? First, we must remember that it was God who chose to communicate His Word through apostles who were ordinary human beings, writing ordinary letters to real churches in the ancient world. Chapter 16 about relationships impacted by the resurrection is just as inspired by God as chapter 15 about the resurrection. Chapter 16 beautifully shows how the resurrection is the bond that makes us gather together and stay together. What is the glue for church unity? The resurrection!

Because Jesus rose again, we are personally and permanently bonded to each other. The gospel news is practical - we each are forgiven our sins because of the crucifixion of Jesus, plus He rose again and ever lives to intercede for us. Because we are each bonded to Jesus, we are bonded to each other.

1. We possess a bond of love that is comprehensive. (v.12-16)

In verse 12, one final time in this letter, Paul signaled a new topic with two words, “*now concerning.*” What is the final topic? The resurrection bond. First example was the networking between a man named Apollos and the church in Corinth. Paul had “*strongly urged*” Apollos to visit the believers in Corinth, and it seems Apollos was providentially detained by God. Paul knew that Apollos would visit when he had the opportunity to do so. How did Paul know? Because of the resurrection bond of love between Apollos and Corinth.

The bond was not just between Apollos and Corinth. Whenever a new person was converted, that person automatically joined the network of connections within a growing family of believers. Think of the power of what is revealed in verse 12. Just 20 years after the resurrection of Jesus, new churches had already been started all over the region, and those new churches already had strong bonds of love with each other, comprehensively. Paul, Apollos, Corinth, Ephesus, and more to be named in the rest of our passage.

The word “brother” was written by Paul three times in this passage – verse 12 “*our brother Apollos,*” verse 15, “*I urge you, brothers,*” and verse 20, “*All the brothers send you greetings...*” The bonds of love were described as a brotherhood, and it was more than merely how each person related to Christ or how each person related to Paul. The expanding grid of believers were connected to each other like circuitry, and more like a family band of brothers and sisters.

This deepening and spreading companionship or unity was Paul's consistent message throughout this letter from his early chapters, down to his final paragraphs. So, Paul wrote in verse 13, "*Be watchful,*" Why would Paul write that here and now, right after the statements about Apollos? Because of the problems of disunity that had erupted in Corinth! Paul knew that many of the same distractions that Corinth had faced would continue to be faced in the church in Corinth in the days after receiving this first letter. By writing the words "be watchful," Paul was guiding the church in Corinth to keep applying a foundational lesson from their recent struggles with maintaining brotherhood and sisterhood. Namely, the lesson was to remain watchful! The believers in Corinth needed to learn to live with a perpetual and sturdy alertness. They were being called by the Risen Lord to a constant vigilance, in order to prevail in the core truth of their integrated family bonds that were established by the very death and resurrection of Christ Himself. Be watchful for ways to have the resurrection bond continue!

Paul's next words in verse 13 were "*stand firm in the faith.*" To what was Paul referring here? The faith was that basic set of core truths that Paul had taught them when Paul was there in person in Corinth, the truths of the faith which they had believed, and the same set of truths of the faith that Paul had just now reiterated in writing in this letter, by way of reminder and bracing. It did not matter whether the Corinthian culture rejected the truths of the faith. What mattered was that the believers must stand firm in those principles. Christians were being urged to keep on affirming what God had done for the household of faith in raising Christ Jesus from the dead. Paul was summoning them to hold tight to God's truths about sin and salvation, and about death and resurrection, and about family bonding.

The next guidance Paul wrote in verse 13 was this phrase, "*act like men, be strong.*" Here Paul was instructing them to exhibit behavior fitting for grown-ups, in contrast to behavior expected from children. It was a call for progress and regress, a call for unabated development, all the way to maturity. Back in chapter 13, Paul had written the same contrast of childishness with manhood and womanhood, "*when I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways.*"

Paul's pleading here was that a seasoned Christian approach to life was always expected of believers, rather than an adolescent or naïve approach to life. So, whenever in the future that church in Corinth again were to face new difficulties and become again burdened with potential distractions, they must not allow those matters to result in fresh divisions in the church again, as they had done previously. The letter of 1 Corinthians was supposed to have a permanent

impact on the church in Corinth! One main theme of 1 Corinthians was unity in their church, and Paul had thoroughly written about how unity did not arise from them cultivating the same human interests or gravitating toward the same earthly desires. Rather, unity in the church in Corinth came only from each of the brothers and sisters having a personal connection with the risen Christ by faith. In fact, Paul had been abundantly clear that nothing could hold the church together except the risen Lord. In their growing toward ripe wisdom in Christ, they would need cultivate the needed full strength capability to remain on good terms with everyone.

Building on that, the next guidance Paul gave was in verse 14, *“Let all that you do be done in love.”* In all of their upcoming work to preserve church unity, they needed to strike a certain tone in Corinth. What would need to be the tone of their unity? Love! A loving tone. Family love was to be their comprehensive way of operating. Every function and every activity of the community was to receive the touch of love and the shaping influence of love. Over the last 2,000 years since Paul wrote this letter, that same atmosphere or tone of Christian churches has been called to the very same - an atmosphere of love.

Paul moved on to verses 15-16, where Paul applied this love with an urging toward good teamwork. Paul’s concrete good example was some people that they knew within their own church, and here Paul named names - *“...the household of Stephanas.....they have devoted themselves to the service of the saints.”* Devoted themselves to serving others. Could that be said of everyone in Corinth? Notice the word “devoted.” It means committed. Their commitment had to do with their loyalty. It was a household, a family within the troubled church family in Corinth that saw themselves as assigned by God and stationed by God there in the troubled church family, in order to serve the saints, and serve the saints some more, and then serve the saints some more. The household of Stephanas was dedicated to serving, serving, serving. Paul did not write that they served only one faction, but would not serve the other faction. The Stephanas family served all the saints, all the Christians. The household of Stephanas was a household that was doing it right, so Paul shined the spotlight on them as a teaching moment. That family was loving and serving all believers. That was having the desired effect of bonding and unifying and healing.

No serving, no functioning, no actions within their church community remained untouched or unshaped by The Stephanas family’s commitment to love all the saints. How did that love show itself in their church? Paul explained the key in verse 16, *“be subject to such as these, and to every fellow worker and laborer.”*

Be subject to the Stephanas family. They were loving and serving. If they asked others to join them and help them to love and serve, then those others were to be subject to the Stephanas family's efforts. And furthermore, please notice in verse 16, that all of the believers were to be subject to every fellow worker and every fellow laborer. Anyone who was loving and serving, the church members were to see themselves on the same team with the lovers and the servers, in the same family with the workers and with the laborers!

Being subject to! That is the word for teamwork. It was important for them to notice that the subjection and teamwork also flowed both ways! The Stephanas Family were not being named by Paul to become the first family, the royal family, the top controlling family, either. The Stephanas family was also to subject themselves to other fellow workers. The two-directional nature of the submission and cooperation was the exact call to teamwork that took The Stephanas Family right out of the realm of power and control. The church in Corinth could never achieve adult-like unity and teamwork if they had one family attempting to manage everything. No. Genuine love always leads to a true mutuality of teamwork. That was what would enable them to face their discomforts and would allow others to also to work, to contribute, to serve and to participate in the decisions on things.

2. We benefit from refreshing relationships of joy and holiness between persons and churches. (v.17-20)

In verse 17, Paul listed 3 names because those persons had departed from Corinth and traveled more than 400 miles in order to visit Paul over in Ephesus. Paul was open about his own relationship to these 3 persons who brought Paul joy – in verse 17 we read, “*I rejoice at the coming of Stephanas and Fortunatus and Achaicus...*” Paul gave them recognition in verse 18, “*...for they refreshed my spirit...*” Paul encouraged the church to follow Paul's example and likewise for them to “*Give recognition to such people.*” Paul was both demonstrating and fostering a healthy family way of relating among the people of God.

The loving refreshing joyful community was a wider community than just within the local church of Corinth. Multiple other churches in other places had an affinity for the church in the city of Corinth, for Paul wrote this in verse 19, “*The churches of Asia send you greetings.*”

The existence of these joyful and refreshing bonds extends to times when individuals offer greetings to whole churches. As a sample of this, we read further in verse 19, “*Aquila and Prisca, together with the church in their house, send you hearty greetings in the Lord.*” A couple in one place, and the church that met in their house, were sending greetings to a church in another part of the world.

Paul wrote in verse 20, “*Greet one another with a holy kiss.*” (which was the equivalent of saying, today, greet one another with a handshake or a hug. It was a proper and acceptable greeting, as a sign of peace.) The greeting was to remain holy, meaning that they were not to turn the sign of peace into something else, something unholy, such as an inappropriate kiss, that would cause discord. A greeting of peace was a greeting that united them, and that a greeting that expressed the beauty of community. Such greetings contributed to the joy.

3. Maintaining healthy community connections is one of our core values: so we insist on it, we protect it, and we restore it. (v.21-24)

The nature of their bond with believers and churches was Jesus, crucified and risen again for them. They needed to insist on their resurrection bond, protect it, and restore it in Corinth.

Paul had been emphasizing this bond since the beginning of his letter. It was a unique bond. In contrast, what was the glue for a community of Jews to stay together – their race! And what was the glue that held together a community of Greek people – their commitment to education and seeking knowledge and wisdom. In contrast to those kinds of glue, what was the only thing that held churches together? Listen again to how Paul emphasized our only bonding glue back in chapter 1. 1 Corinthians 1:22-23, “...*Jews demand signs and Greeks seeks wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified...*” It was not the Corinthian sports games plus Jesus. It was not patriotism plus Jesus. the church was all about Christ Jesus.

In verse 21, Paul after having someone else write his words for him so far, now himself picked up the pen. Suddenly in verse 22, we are surprised to read what Paul wrote, “*If anyone has no love for the Lord, let him be accursed. Our Lord, come!*” This surprising sentence was to be understood within the same context of a loving church environment. If anyone decided to reject Christ’s love, that did not change the nature of the loving environment. The love of the church in Corinth would not be hindered by that person who has no love for the Lord. Each person who was linked to Christ’s love vertically was also linked to the love of the church community horizontally. But each person who refused Christ’s love vertically, also refused to participate in the love of the church community.

Conclusion: As we wrap up our study of this important book, let’s all remember one thing from our study of 1 Corinthians: **the same Christ who unified us in the first place can continuously restore our unity.**

In the last two verses, Paul wrote about the grace and love. Grace is treating others in a loving way, though they deserve the opposite. Grace is treating people

with a love they have not earned. That same grace was used to restore their unity that had been disturbed.

SI - Pastor Charles Spurgeon and Pastor Joseph Parker both had churches in London, England in the same years in 1800s. On one occasion, Pastor Parker made a comment about the poor condition of children who were arriving at the orphanage supported by Pastor Spurgeon's church. It was a mercy home for children without parents. The problem was the way that Pastor Parker's comment was reported to Pastor Spurgeon -- that Pastor Parker had criticized the orphanage itself. So, Pastor Spurgeon responded by blasting Pastor Parker. That attack was printed in the newspapers and became the talk of London. The next Sunday in London, many people flocked to Pastor Parker's church in order to hear what Pastor Parker would say in response to Pastor Spurgeon. Pastor Parker said, "I understand that Dr. Spurgeon is not in his pulpit today, and this is the Sunday they ordinarily take an offering for the orphanage. So, this morning we are taking a love offering here for their orphanage." The crowd was delighted. The ushers had to empty the collection plates 3 times. Later that week there was a knock at Pastor Parker's study. It was Pastor Spurgeon. Pastor Spurgeon said, "You know, Pastor Parker, you have practiced grace on me. You have given me not what I deserved, you have given me what I needed."

The same Christ that unified us in the first place by His resurrection, can restore our unity. Grace and love are the keys to building and restoring a unified church. This is what we call the resurrection bond.