



CHARIS-MATTERS

STUDIES IN FIRST CORINTHIANS

Text

First Corinthians 16:12-24

Topic

The apostle Paul uses a strong word, translated “addicted” in the King James Version, to describe the proper attitude of expressing love for God’s saints by serving them

Title

“Addicted to Love”

Introduction

Talking about “the household of Stephanas” the apostle Paul wrote (in verse 15) “they have devoted themselves to the ministry of the saints. The KJV translates that same phrase, “they have **addicted** themselves to the ministry of the saints.”

A Christian is to be a love-addict, a love-junkie. You should have difficulty controlling your desires to serve God’s saints, becoming more-and-more preoccupied with spiritual activities.

Had all of the Corinthian believers been addicted to serving the saints they would not have needed the corrections in this letter. They would not have had the inclination to flaunt their liberty in Christ, or to sue one another in

open court, or to tolerate sexual sin, or to promote divisions, or to abuse the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

No, they would have been too busy loving others and serving them to engage in those contrary activities.

And it would have given them a greater sense of urgency for the lost. Paul used another strong word when he said, in verse twenty-two, “if anyone does not love the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be accursed.” The word “accursed” is the Greek, *anathema*. It is used in the Bible to describe those who are separated from Jesus and who are lost and will therefore perish if they do not receive the salvation offered to them.

At the end of this letter it comes down to these two words: Addicted and Anathema.

I’ll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 Saints Need To See You Addicted To Serving, and #2 Sinners Need To Hear “*Anathema!*” In Your Sharing.

#1 Saints Need To See You Addicted To Serving (v13-21)

The church at Corinth was a mess. But not entirely. There was the household of Stephanas and at least two other men, Fortunatus and Achaicus, whom he could hold forth as examples. They were addicted to love, addicted to serving the saints.

How did they get and stay addicted? We’re told in verses thirteen and fourteen.

1 Corinthians 16:13 Watch, stand fast in the faith, be brave, be strong.

These four quick exhortations are all borrowed from military vocabulary. Paul was telling the Corinthians, and us, to have both the submission and discipline of a soldier at war.

You are a soldier who is on “watch.” There are at least three things being on watch suggests:

1. First, we are to understand that we are constantly on watch. We’re not just watching when we serve in the church or are involved in official activities. It’s a 24/7 position.
2. Second, we are to adopt an attitude of *“Not on my watch!”* with regard to any advancement by our enemies. We can’t give ground to the devil nor yield to the flesh - even for a moment.
3. Third, we are also watching for the imminent return of the Lord.

Next you read that you are to “stand fast in the faith.” This isn’t telling you to have more faith. “The faith” is a term that describes the nonnegotiable truths of the Bible. You are to be familiar with Bible truth and apply it in your everyday experience.

Geno said something the other day at our morning men’s study that stuck with me. He said that we should think of our hearts as soil into which the Word of God is sown rather than a filter through which we choose what to obey or ignore.

Next, the third military term, is “be brave.” The KJV reads, “quit you like men,” meaning act like a man, grow up, be mature. Whether it was the Gulf War or the invasion of Iraq, I was in awe at the precision of our military forces. They “quit” themselves like men, with courage and bravery. They trusted in their training, in their superiors, and thought on their feet when necessary.

A church should be like that and to an even higher degree. People should watch with shock and awe as believers face down the enemy and free those taken captive.

The last of the military jargon is “be strong.” Literally it is “be strengthened.” Now I’m not a big language scholar, but I see that the verb is in what is called the passive tense, meaning it is something done *to* you

not *by* you. I have to see it as a reminder that the Lord indwells us by His Holy Spirit to empower us.

1 Corinthians 16:14 Let all that you do be done with love.

All this soldier-talk is now qualified by the word “love.” I’m to have the submission and discipline of a specially trained soldier and then act with the humility, the mercy, the gentleness, and the compassion of the Lord’s love.

Maybe an example or two or three would help!

1 Corinthians 16:15 I urge you, brethren - you know the household of Stephanas, that it is the firstfruits of Achaia, and that they have devoted themselves to the ministry of the saints -

1 Corinthians 16:16 that you also submit to such, and to everyone who works and labors with us.

Earlier we learned that “the household of Stephanas” were the first of Paul’s converts in Corinth. They got saved and immediately got to serving. Looking at them you came to the conclusion that they were “devoted... to the ministry of the saints.” They were addicted to serving.

That’s the kind of example you want to “submit to.” In the midst of believers flaunting their liberty in Christ and living generally carnal lives was this oasis, the household of Stephanas, for all to see.

1 Corinthians 16:17 I am glad about the coming of Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus, for what was lacking on your part they supplied.

1 Corinthians 16:18 For they refreshed my spirit and yours. Therefore acknowledge such men.

These three men were probably the ones who brought to Paul the letter from the Corinthians asking him to clarify the issues he covered in First Corinthians. As such, they bore much bad news.

But their faith and faithfulness, which was “lacking” in most of the Corinthians, was “supplied” to Paul as an encouragement. Paul was a

‘glass half-full’ kind of guy. Rather than feel defeated that the majority of the Corinthians were carnal, he chose to be encouraged by a minority who were spiritual.

I can see how these guys “refreshed [Paul’s] spirit,” but how did they refresh the spirit of the Corinthians? It seems to mean that their visit gave Paul the opportunity to respond personally to the church and therefore “refresh” any who would receive his letter as the Word of God.

I think, too, it might mean that we sometimes need an example in order to be “refreshed” in our own zeal to serve the Lord.

1 Corinthians 16:19 The churches of Asia greet you. Aquila and Priscilla greet you heartily in the Lord, with the church that is in their house.

1 Corinthians 16:20 All the brethren greet you. Greet one another with a holy kiss.

The “churches of Asia” would include those in Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, Laodicea, Colosse, and Hieropolis. They were all founded thanks to the efforts of Paul as he responded to the open door of ministry to go to Ephesus.

In keeping with the context of Paul’s exhortations, think of these churches as outposts. They were established by God in enemy territory in order to provide deliverance for those held captive. Sad that in Corinth the church had so deteriorated.

“Aquila and Priscilla” owned the tent-making business that Paul worked for in Ephesus. They, too, were addicted to serving God’s saints.

“All the brethren” still greeted them - *even though they were blowing it!*

A word about the “holy kiss.” In the New Testament church, it was a symbolic expression of the love, forgiveness, and unity that existed among believers. It became associated with the celebration of communion, as a prelude to partaking the elements, to show that you had no problems with other believers that needed to be resolved. At first it was not restricted to

your own gender. Men did kiss men, and women kissed women, but men and women also kissed each other. In later history it was restricted to those of your own gender.

Whether it's a holy kiss or a holy hug or a holy handshake, it all symbolizes the intimacy of fellowship.

1 Corinthians 16:21 The salutation with my own hand - Paul's.

Paul dictated this letter to a copyist but at this point he took the pen and wrote the final words himself. It was a simple gesture but one that communicated his love and personal concern.

In a very careful way Paul drew a distinction for the believers in Corinth.

- They could be addicted to love and the serving of the saints and maintain their church as an outpost for the edification of believers and the evangelism of nonbelievers.
- Or they could go on being known as divisive, immoral, selfish, indulgent, litigious individuals.

There are Corinthian churches still. And there are 'Corinthians' in every church. Let's examine ourselves and be addicted to love and serving.

#2 Sinners Need To Hear "*Anathema!*" In Your Sharing (v22-24)

Part of the mission of the church is to declare the Gospel to lost sinners. I believe it is with that in mind that Paul wrote these closing comments in his own hand.

1 Corinthians 16:22 If anyone does not love the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be accursed. O Lord, come!

Let's first define the key words. We've already said that "accursed" is *anathema* and refers to those who are separated from Jesus and who are

lost and will therefore perish if they do not receive the salvation offered to them.

“O Lord, come!” is a translation of the compound word *Maranatha!* Maranatha is formed by the three parts:

1. “Mar” – Lord.
2. “An” – our.
3. “Atha” – to come.

It can mean “our Lord has come,” or “our Lord is coming.” It can also be the expression of your constant desire as you say to the Lord, “Come!”

One way to understand this pairing of the words, “anathema maranatha,” is to see it in the sense that nonbelievers are perishing who need to know that Jesus has come and is coming. They are *anathema* and will be for eternity unless they receive the Gospel.

And who is to share the Gospel with them? That would be us! Thus we have no time for division, immorality, selfishness, indulgence, or nonbiblical litigation. And by ‘no time’ I mean that we are to maintain our outpost rather than pursue our own carnal interests and urges. The consequences for the lost of our slacking off are too severe.

1 Corinthians 16:23 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

1 Corinthians 16:24 My love be with you all in Christ Jesus. Amen.

John Gill commented on “the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,” saying,

It is a wish for a supply of all grace from Christ, and an increase of it in the saints; that they may have the communications of it to them, to quicken, invigorate, and draw forth into exercise the grace they have received, and to enable and assist them in the discharge of every duty.

It was Paul’s way of reminding them they could do the things he had commanded and urged in this letter.

In saying he loved them “in Christ Jesus” he was telling them that despite their many failings he was nevertheless empowered by the Lord to love them and seek their best. He was exercising the love he had defined and described in chapter thirteen.

God’s grace supplied Paul with the ability to love them. He was addicted to love, to loving them, to serving them.

Are you addicted to love? If you are, you will find yourself serving God’s saints. Not just the ones you are friends with or who are easy to be around. No, you will consider your life and its example to *any* and *every* saint.

In fact, it might be best to consider a hypothetical saint who might be slightly weak in the faith. Maybe a new believer. Does your example *strengthen* that saint or *stumble* that saint? Just how Corinthian are you?

If you get that resolved, get back on your watch, then you’ll find yourself thinking more about those who are *anathema*.

Your heart towards them will be *Maranatha* - the Lord has come and He is coming and they need to hear it.

Maybe this can all be summarized, all be captured, by the third sense of *Maranatha* - that your heart would constantly say to the Lord, “Come!”

Because if you really mean it you will only, always be doing those things that would be pleasing to Him.