BUILT DIFFERENT

LESSON NINETEEN

COMMENTARY

COMMENTARY NOTES

1 CORINTHIANS 16:1–4

Roy Ciampa, in the *Pillar New Testament Commentary*, comments on Paul's collection for the saints:

16:1 Paul introduces vv. 1–4 with Now about, the way he introduced several of the new topics, starting with his reference to the letter from the Corinthians in 7:1. It seems likely that the subject introduced this time, *the collection for the Lord's people*, was one about which the Corinthians had inquired in that letter, since the abrupt way in which he broaches the issue seems more consistent with the way a subject is brought up in a conversation when both parties know the topic is on the agenda. Presumably he deals with it at this point because the topic is directly related to his travel plans, a topic normally left for the closing of a letter. The word translated the *Lord's people* is a challenge to translators. It has traditionally been translated "saints," although that word has gained different meanings over time and is not a particularly helpful translation in our day. The Greek term literally means "the holy ones," although not in the sense of morally or spiritually superior people but as a way of referring to God's people as those who have been especially consecrated to God (see our comments on 1:2, where the TNIV translates the term "his holy people"). Verse 3 makes it clear that in this context Paul is referring to the Christians in Jerusalem who were to be the recipients of a special gift from the churches founded by Paul around the northern Mediterranean. Paul mentions the gift being collected for the believers in Jerusalem not only here but also in 2 Corinthians 8–9 (following up on the instructions given here) and in Romans 15:25–32. It is also mentioned in Acts 24:17. More information on the circumstances behind the offering and the motivations for it may be found in those passages and commentaries on them.

Paul had apparently discussed this matter with the Corinthians before, either in person or in a letter, and did not feel the need to go into those matters again here. Later he would reinforce some points about the offering in 2 Corinthians 8–9. It seems that the believers in Jerusalem had chronic economic problems, and Paul and other leaders encouraged the giving of material support from other churches to the mother church. As Jervis points out, most scholars have understood that for Paul the collection for the Jerusalem believers served as "a symbol of the unity of the Church. The collection was meant to represent, primarily to the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem, the unity of both gentile and Jew in Christ, and thereby to be a means of reconciling the Jewish and gentile branches of the Church." It *may* also have had something to do with the Old Testament eschatological expectation that in the days of God's future redemption of Israel the Gentiles would make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem and the wealth of the nations would flow into that city. While the word translated *collection* was "employed in epigraphical and papyrological sources to denote collections of various sorts," it was used "chiefly of religious collections for a god, a temple, etc."

At other points within this letter Paul has tried to reinforce the solidarity between this church and the other churches that had been founded. In 4:17 he spoke of "what I teach everywhere in every church," and in 7:17 of "the rule I lay down in all the churches." In 11:16 he said that "the churches of God" had no other practice but the one he enjoined the Corinthians to follow as well. In 14:33–34 he again wanted the practice in the Corinthian church to be consistent with what was done "in all the congregations of the Lord's people." Later on in this chapter he will bring greetings to the Corinthians from the churches in the province of Asia (16:19). Such notes testify to Paul's open agenda of contributing to the end-time universal worship of the one true God by Gentiles (see Introduction, 21–25) and recall the allusion to Malachi 1:11 in 1 Corinthians 1:2, where Paul refers to "all those who call upon the name of the Lord *in every place.*"

His statement in this verse that the Corinthians should *Do what I told the Galatian churches to do* is consistent with this theme of biblical universalism. There was no reason for the Corinthians to handle this situation differently from other churches. The very project of a collection from the various predominantly Gentile churches spoke of participating in something larger than any one church and should have built a sense of common cause between the Gentile churches involved as well as between them and the intended recipients of the gift. There is much to be said for the benefits of

like-minded churches putting their resources together to address a problem or meet a need that could not be effectively met by one or two churches on their own. In part Paul's project seems to have been intended to build a stronger sense of unity and solidarity among churches that may not have naturally tended to think of themselves as members of the very same family.

Of course the Corinthians cannot be expected to know what Paul told the Galatians; his point in the second part of this verse is merely to point out that the directions he will give the Corinthians are the same as those given to other churches. He will spell out those directions in the next three verses.

16:2 Having introduced the topic of the collection, Paul explains what preparations should be made for the collection before he comes to Corinth for his planned visit: *On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with your income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made.* The first day of the week was, of course, the day on which Christ rose from the dead (Matt. 28:1; Mark 16:2; Luke 24:1; John 20:1). Christians began to gather together to celebrate on that day sometime soon after that (John 20:19; Acts 20:7). The mention of *the first day of every week* along with the purpose *that when I come no collections will have to be made* suggests that the setting aside of money would not be just the setting apart within one's own possessions but the setting aside of the money by presenting it to the leaders of the church (cf. Acts 4:34–5:2). Otherwise it would not matter which day a person chose to set money aside and collections would still need to be made upon Paul's arrival. Paul's emphasis falls on the value of advanced planning and preparation rather than last-minute scrambling and the resultant pressure. While Paul's guidance here may well be applied to other financial commitments the members of a congregation take on (including commitments to a church's annual budget and other financial needs), it should be noted that Paul is not discussing giving toward a church's regular budget but the preparations to be taken for one particular and special project. Ralph Martin has pointed out that "what may have seemed to be a very mundane business—the duty of allocating a sum of cash from the weekly budget—is set in a noble frame by the reference to 'the first day of the week.' " As he argues, this clearly suggests that "there was, in his mind, no disparity between the 'secular' and the 'sacred', and no incongruity in the thought that the offering of money is an integral part of Christian worship. Money which had been honestly gained in the toil of the week is to be brought to the assembly of the Church and thus made part of the Sunday worship."12

The key word in the phrase translated *in keeping with your income* has the sense "have things turn out well, *prosper, succeed*" (BDAG). Chrysostom emphasizes the passive voice of the verb: "He did not say, give 'this much,' or 'that much,' but 'as things have prospered for him,' whether much or little. Nor did he say, 'what any one may have gained,' but, 'things have prospered for him,' signifying that the supply is from God.' " This is probably reading in too much. The translation *in keeping with your income* may be read in a very modern way, as though each one's income would be consistent each week, while in Paul's world most people would be more likely to have good and bad weeks, weeks in which things turned out well financially and weeks in which they did not (weeks in which they were regularly employed and weeks in which they were not, or weeks in which they experienced greater or less benevolence on the part of others). The point is that those who made a lot of money in a given week would be expected to give more than those who did not. As Keener points out, Paul's instruction that each one should give as they have prospered is an application of Deuteronomy 15:13–14, where the Israelites are instructed to provide generously for their slaves who had gained their freedom after six years of service: "And when you release them, do not send them away empty-handed. Supply them liberally from your flock, your threshing floor and your winepress. Give to them as the Lord your God has blessed you."

16:3–4 Paul now explains how he will facilitate the delivery of the gift once he arrives in Corinth: *Then, when I arrive, I will give letters of introduction to the men you approve and send them with your gift to Jerusalem.* Paul had already mentioned his plan to return to Corinth in 4:18–21, a plan the Corinthians clearly knew about before receiving this letter. He would make certain that the Corinthians' *gift* would be delivered in a way that would represent them well. The word Paul uses for the Corinthians' gift is the word usually translated "grace," but which is also used, as here, for a "practical application of goodwill, *(a sign of) favor, gracious deed/gift, benefaction*" (BDAG). The

use of the word would still be a reminder that the gift was an extension of grace on the part of the Corinthians, just as the spiritual gifts they received from the Lord were an extension of his grace to them.

Their gift would be delivered by men who were especially approved by the congregation for the task. Those men would be authorized by both the Corinthian congregation and the apostle Paul himself, who would give them *letters of introduction* (literally, just "letters," but the TNIV translation is undoubtedly correct).

The men appointed by the Corinthians could go to Jerusalem without Paul, or he could accompany them: *If it seems advisable for me to go also, they will accompany me.* Presumably by If it seems advisable Paul means, "*If it seems advisable* to you Corinthians," since he had stressed the approval of the Corinthians in v. 3. There could be various reasons why it would be advisable (or fitting, appropriate) for Paul to go along. No doubt he knew the people in Jerusalem and could make the proper introductions, while the appointed Corinthians would probably be newcomers to the city. Paul might also be better equipped to explain to the Jerusalem believers the background and intent of the broader project of which the Corinthian gift was a part than members of any one particular church. If Paul were to go, as the apostle to the Gentiles and the primary force behind the collection he would be the most prominent member of the group, so he says, *they will accompany me*, rather than, "I will accompany them."[1]

1 CORINTHIANS 16:5–11

Thomas Schreiner, In the *Tyndale New Testament Commentary*, discusses Paul's travel plans:

5–7. Paul relays his travel plans, informing the Corinthians that he hopes to see them after visiting Macedonia. We discover from 2 Corinthians 1:15–16 that at some point his plans evolved so that he hoped to see the Corinthians twice: once before and once after he had visited Macedonia. When he writes 1 Corinthians he hopes that he might spend a significant amount of time with the Corinthians or even *spend the winter*, though he recognizes that it all depends upon the Lord's will (cf. 1 Cor. 4:19). Certainly Paul wants to strengthen and edify the Corinthians (cf. Rom. 1:12), but at the same time he desires that they might *help me on my journey*. The verb (*propempo*) is regularly used for supporting and helping those engaged in mission (cf. Rom. 15:24; 1 Cor. 16:11; 2 Cor. 1:16; Titus 3:13; 3 John 6). If the *Lord permits*, Paul desires to spend some significant time with the Corinthians.

8–9. Paul explains why he does not come immediately: he is currently ministering in Ephesus and planning to stay there at least until Pentecost, which is celebrated fifty days after Passover and thus is dated in late spring. The reason for the stay is elaborated. A significant opportunity for the gospel has opened up: the word *door* is used elsewhere by Paul to denote an opportunity for proclaiming the gospel (cf. 2 Cor. 2:12; Col. 4:3). Thus Paul certainly wants to linger. Luke details the account of Paul's mission in Ephesus (Acts 19:1–41), informing the reader that Paul stayed for two years (Acts 19:10). Luke's account also verifies Paul's rendition, saying that 'all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord' (Acts 19:10; cf. also 19:20, 26). The adversaries Paul mentions are also confirmed in Acts; the riot stirred up by Demetrius and his co-workers threatened the mission (Acts 19:23–41; see also 1 Cor. 15:32).

10–11. Timothy (see the commentary on 4:17) was a valued colleague and co-worker of Paul's. Paul anticipates Timothy's arrival in Corinth (4:17) and he is concerned that Timothy be received well. The Corinthians are exhorted to treat Timothy well so that *he has nothing to fear* upon his arrival. Some think these instructions were given because Timothy was timid, but this reading is almost certainly mistaken. Paul instructs that Timothy should be honoured because he realizes that some who are inclined to reject Pauline teaching might dishonour Timothy since Timothy speaks in Paul's name, and Timothy will arrive shortly after they have received Paul's letter. They might dishonour Timothy as the

[1]Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), 841–845.

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Pauline representative; but Paul expects the Corinthians to *return* (*propempo*) Timothy to Paul as befits one involved in mission.

12. Apollos (see commentary on 1:12) plays a significant role in the letter, especially in the discussion of the divisions in 1:10–4:21. Certainly Paul did not think that Apollos was responsible for the divisions fomented by his followers, since Paul *strongly urged* Apollos to visit Corinth. Here is confirmatory evidence that the problem of divisions rested with the Corinthians and not with the church leaders. Certainly Paul believes that Apollos will be a significant help in the midst of a church torn apart by strife. Probably for reasons of mission and ministry, or perhaps because he disagreed with the divisions in Corinth in his name, Apollos did not agree with Paul's recommendation to come immediately and suggested a later visit. One of the remarkable features is the freedom Paul grants Apollos to make up his own mind whether or not he should visit Corinth. Paul urged Apollos to visit but did not coerce him, and finally left it up to Apollos whether to visit and when.[2]

1 CORINTHIANS 16:13–24

Gordon Fee, in the *NICNT*, explains Paul's final instructions and greetings to the Corinthians:

13 This first series of imperatives is as surprising as it is abrupt. Their presence is probably best explained formally: As noted above, and especially in the earlier letters, Paul seems to have developed the habit of beginning his conclusions with words of exhortation, as though reluctant to sign off without a final word of urgency. These first four imperatives are related in that they all call to watchfulness and steadfastness as to the faith itself (cf. 15:58). In light of all that has preceded Paul is probably urging loyalty to the gospel as they received it from him.

First, the Corinthians are urged to "be watchful" or "alert." This imperative occurs elsewhere in the NT, including Paul, in eschatological contexts, urging watchfulness in light of the Lord's return.5 But it can also be a call to watchfulness with regard to the enemy (1 Pet. 5:8) or to corrosive influences (Acts 20:31). Given the full context of our present letter, the latter is most likely what is intended, hence "be on your guard." This seems the more so in light of the second imperative, "stand firm in the faith," which is a modified version of the concern expressed at the beginning and end of the preceding instruction/correction (15:1, 58; cf. 10:12). In Paul this verb invariably has the sense of "standing" firm in Christ, as opposed to "falling." The use of "in *the* faith" in place of "the gospel" is clear evidence that in Paul from the very beginning this noun can refer to the content of what is believed as well as to the activity of trusting itself.8

The third and fourth imperatives in this list are calls to courage, in which Paul seems to be recalling the language of the Psalter (Ps. 31:24). Ordinarily, one would expect such imperatives in a context of outside opposition; but in the present context Paul is probably urging them to remain steadfast in the gospel he preached, and to do so courageously in the face of the errors and behavioral aberrations that are rife among them.

14 The preceding imperatives have basically to do with their remaining faithful to the gospel itself, this final one with their relationships to one another. "Do all things in love" echoes the marvelous "interlude" (chap. 13) in the preceding argument (chaps. 12/14). Apart from that passage this word does not occur frequently in this letter, but its appearance there and in the crucial passage at the beginning of the issue of idolatry (8:1–3), as well as at the heart of all of Paul's ethical instructions, makes it certain that in Paul's understanding this is the imperative that covers much that has preceded. "All things" would include the quarrels in the name of leaders (chaps. 1–3), their attitude toward him (chaps. 4 and 9), the lawsuits (6:1–11), husband-wife relationships (chap. 7), the abuse of the weak by those with "knowledge" (8:1–10:22), the abuse of the "have-nots" at the Lord's Supper (11:17–34), and the failure to edify the church in worship (chaps. 12–14). If they were to "do *all things* in

[2]Thomas R. Schreiner, *1 Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary*, ed. Eckhard J. Schnabel, vol. 7, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 2018), 331–332.

love," then these other things would not be happening. It is therefore no surprise that this is the final expression of parenesis in the letter.

15 The appeal of this brief paragraph (vv. 15–18), that they honor Stephanas's household and others like him who labor among them, has its precedent in Paul's earliest letter (1 Thess. 5:12–14). However, as with what has immediately preceded (vv. 13–14), this material is not to be explained simply on formal grounds. This is made clear in the present case by the very awkwardness at the beginning of this appeal, through which Paul's emphases emerge. The later clause (v. 16) is properly the (objective) complement of the opening verb, "Now I urge you, brothers and sisters." But it is suspended to make room for the explanatory parenthesis that gives the *reason* they should submit to Stephanas and his household: "You know the household of Stephanas, that they are, etc." The result is a singular emphasis on Stephanas, and the Corinthians' need especially to recognize him, to which then is added that they need to be in submission to all who so labor among them. This strong commendation of Stephanas implies that he had been loyal to Paul in the present tensions within the community. The language of the next clause (v. 16) further makes certain that he is a leader in the church. Very likely he is also a source of further information about the condition of the church, quite apart from their letter.

In calling attention to the "household of Stephanas," Paul reminds them of two things about Stephanas that they already well know.12 First, his "household" were "the first converts in [the province of] Achaia."14 It is impossible to determine who would have made up the household, which included at least two or more adult members, since the second verb is plural, "*they* have devoted themselves to the service of the saints." It is possible, though not provable, that Fortunatus and Achaicus were themselves members of his household, perhaps as slaves or attached freedmen.

Second, Stephanas and his household are noted among the Corinthian believers for having "devoted themselves unto service for17 the Lord's people." Here are people who in self-dedication took it upon themselves to minister to others in Corinth. One cannot be certain as to the specifics of this "service" since the word is ambiguous enough to cover a number of "ministries," including that of teaching and preaching.19 It may be that Stephanas's house also served as one of the places of meeting, in which case he would also be one of the "patrons" of the Lord's Supper. But that, too, cannot be known. The content of the following appeal (v. 16), including both the urging of "submission" to "Stephanas's household" and the addition of "everyone who joins in the work and labors at it," implies that their ministry was probably not limited to good deeds of service among the believers, but also included some responsibility for the ministry of the Word.

16 This sentence functions as the object of the verb "I urge," with which this appeal began. Paul's concern is that the Corinthians give proper recognition to Stephanas and his household. Thus, "I urge … that you also21 submit to such as these and to everyone who joins in the work, and labors at it." The verb "submit" is used only here in the NT to refer to the relationship of a Christian community to those who labor among them. Although this could possibly mean to be in submission to them in some form of obedience,24 both the context and the similar passage in Paul's earliest preserved letter (1 Thess. 5:12–13) suggest rather that it means "submission in the sense of voluntary yielding in love" (BDAG), much the same as in a later letter (Eph. 5:21), where all are urged to be "subject to one another out of reverence for Christ."

In the first instance this refers to "the household of Stephanas," which is what the words "to such as these" must mean. That is, Paul is not simply generalizing with this language; that is what the next phrase will do. Here he is referring particularly to Stephanas and other members of his household, which very well might include his wife and slaves and/or freedmen. In any case, for Paul the key to such respect or "submission" is not sex or socioeconomic status but ministry, as becomes clear in the addition "and to everyone who joins in the work, and labors at it." The collocation of these two words almost certainly refers to the ministry of the gospel.26 This final addition expands the appeal (that began in v. 15) to include all who so labor among them for the sake of the gospel. But the fact that it occurs merely as an addition implies that the real urgency of the passage has to do with their

attitudes toward Stephanas. Although as earlier (vv. 10–11) one cannot be certain, this looks like one more attempt on Paul's part to urge the Corinthians not only to accept him and his own ministry, but also to extend that acceptance to those who are his co-laborers.

17 This sentence helps to put some things from the two preceding verses into perspective. Paul "rejoices28 over the coming of Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus." Of the latter two men nothing more is known.30 Fortunatus is a common Latin name, meaning "blessed" or "lucky"; it appears to have been common especially among slaves and freedmen. Whoever this Fortunatus was, he was undoubtedly from among the large number of Romans who made up this Roman colony. Achaicus means "one who is from Achaia." This name, too, appears to be the kind that is given to slaves, or taken sometimes by freedmen. Such derivations may mean little or nothing as to their present socioeconomic status. On the other hand, they do add weight to the possibility that these two men are attached to Stephanas in some way. In any case, that is as probable as the oft-repeated assumption that the three men were independent of one another as members of the church in Corinth. If they belonged together in some way, as members of Stephanas's household, then they might very well have been traveling together to Ephesus, perhaps on business, in which case the church would have asked them to carry their letter to Paul. In that sense the three together would become a kind of "official delegation" from the church. If the suggestion regarding these three men is correct, it would serve as further evidence that for Paul the new relationship to Christ of "master and slave" as "brothers" turns the Roman worldview of such a relationship on its head!

In any case, that at least is how Paul himself treats them. By their coming to be with Paul, "they have supplied what was lacking from you." The words "to fill up your lack" mean that Paul's absence from Corinth had left a gap in his life; in these three men, therefore, he has in effect welcomed the whole congregation, of whom they are the representatives, even if they do not in themselves truly "represent" the various elements and points of view in the community. That is, as bearers of the Corinthian letter, they are "officially" from the church, even if they do not represent the point of view of the letter itself. If this is the correct view of things, then there is a degree of irony in this accolade.

18 With two sentences Paul concludes these brief words about the brothers from Corinth. First he explains how it is that they have made up for his not being able to see the whole church in person: "For they have refreshed34 my spirit." This sentence scarcely needs comment for any who have ever been thus visited by longtime friends in the faith, especially those with whom one has worked. Such visits are always "seasons of refreshing" in the Lord, both because of the personal relationships involved and the news of other believers. But what they did for Paul is no surprise; they had already often done so to the Corinthians themselves, as the words "and yours also" attest.

"Therefore," Paul concludes, "recognize36 such men." Although the NIV captures the sense of this with its "Such men deserve recognition," it misses too much by omitting the imperative and inferential conjunction. These words at the conclusion of this paragraph further add to the supposition that even though they have come on behalf of the church, they are among Paul's people in the community. Thus, this final sentence has the effect of being a "letter of commendation" (see on v. 3) for the very ones who came to Paul from the church in the first place. In any case, the language implies that they are now the bearers of Paul's letter back to the church.

Although one cannot be certain of the reconstruction here suggested, it has the advantage both of fitting the letter as a whole and of making good sense of the language and apparent concern that Stephanas continue to be well received in his own community. If so, then one should probably also be somewhat cautious as to the usefulness of the paragraph in helping us understand the role of leadership in the local church. It seems unquestionable that Stephanas at least was a leader in the church in Corinth; probably also Fortunatus and Achaicus, even if they were attached to Stephanas's household in some way. That the church should honor and submit itself in love to such is first of all a local concern, probably related to their relationship to Paul and the church's somewhat antagonistic attitude toward the apostle. On the other hand, there is no reason why such should not always be so in the church, provided of course that one is talking of those who lead by serving the saints (v. 16)

and refreshing them (v. 18). Such people, whether in leadership or otherwise, are always worthy of proper recognition in the community of believers.

19–20a Such greetings as these become another way (besides the mutual collection for Jerusalem) that Paul keeps the various churches aware of, and thus in relationship to, one another. The greetings in this case are threefold: from (a) all the churches of Asia, (b) Aquila and Prisca and the church that meets in their house, and (c) all the brothers and sisters presently with him.

(a) The greeting from all the churches of a province occurs only here in Paul's extant letters. One cannot tell from such language, of course, how much of the province this entails. We know from the "letters" to the seven churches in the Revelation (chaps. 2–3) that by the end of the first century there were churches in many of its cities. The implication of two passages in Acts (19:10 and 26) is that this had already begun with Paul's ministry.

(b) The greeting from Aquila and Prisca probably reflects a twofold reality. First, these were former Corinthians (cf. Acts 18:2–3) who now join Paul in "warmly" greeting old friends; second, this is most likely the house church9 in Ephesus to which Paul himself is attached. Hence the greeting comes not only from their friends, but from the church as well.

Aquila and Prisca are among the companions of Paul about whom there is a bit more information than for some others. Fellow Jews and tentmakers, they first met Paul in Corinth (Acts 18:1–3). They then accompanied him to Ephesus, where they led Apollos to Christ (Acts 18:18–26), and where they still are at the time of this writing. A little later they are apparently again in Rome, where they have another house church (Rom. 16:3–5); but in a much later letter (2 Tim. 4:19) they are back in Ephesus. Both their mobility and their patronage of house churches (in Corinth, Ephesus, and Rome) indicate that they were at least moderately well-to-do.

(c) One cannot be sure whether "all the brothers and sisters" mentioned at the end (v. 20a) is a redundant generalizing of those mentioned at the beginning (v. 19), or whether, more likely, it refers to Paul's various co-workers and traveling companions. If the latter, of course, we cannot name any except Sosthenes (1:1), since Timothy is not with him and one cannot be sure of who else is, although it is possible that Titus would currently be working with him (see 2 Cor. 2:13).

20b From greetings *to* the Corinthians *from* Asia, Paul turns to encourage them to "greet one another," and to do so "with a holy kiss." This is the second of five such appeals in the NT.14 There can be little doubt that this form of greeting prevailed in the church from the very beginning. Most likely it was a carryover from Judaism and from the culture in general. Its background in Judaism can be found in the greeting of both family (e.g., Gen. 27:26; cf. Luke 15:20) and friend (1 Sam. 20:41); it was also the evidence of reconciliation (Gen. 33:4).

By the time of Justin,16 the "kiss of peace" had become a part of the liturgy in Rome. Some have suggested, therefore, that it has liturgical significance here as well, where the kiss of peace, indicating an expression of reconciliation or unity, preceded the Lord's Table. More likely, however, it is simply the common form of greeting, reflecting both the culture (thus "the kiss" as such) and the special relationship that believers had to one another as the family of God (thus a "holy" kiss, that is, a kiss that belonged to the Lord's holy people).18

21 With this sentence Paul proceeds to a third kind of greeting, his to them. In so doing he also begins the autographic conclusion. Thus (lit.): "This greeting is in my own hand, Paul."19 This means that the letter to this point has been inscribed by someone else, probably Sosthenes (see on 1:1), and that the rest, from here through to the end (v. 24), would be in Paul's own "large print" handwriting.21 This means of authentication was a common feature in letters and reports in antiquity. Although it does not occur in all of Paul's letters, the possibility that someone had forged a letter in his name (2 Thess. 2:2) caused him to adopt such a procedure in 2 Thessalonians, and in other later letters as well. His reason for doing so here can only be surmised, but most likely it is related to the questioning of his authority by some in this church.

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22 With pen in hand, immediately following his signature, Paul apparently feels impelled to take one last shot at his Corinthian opponents, in the form of a curse: "If anyone does not love the Lord, let that person be *anathema*." Because of the un-Pauline character of the language26 and of the alleged eucharistic setting for the following *Marana tha*, it has been argued that this is a ban formula, intended to exclude certain people from the Lord's Table. But to arrive at that conclusion requires several leaps with the evidence. It seems quite probable that Paul has here borrowed something traditional; that its setting is a "fencing of the table" for the Lord's Supper seems highly unlikely, at least it would seem so in light of his earlier corrections (11:17–34), where his judgments on their actions require a change, to be sure, but scarcely would result in a ban.

The clue to its meaning lies in two places: (1) Paul's own usage of a similar "curse" in another letter (Gal. 1:8–9), where it is pronounced on those who deviate from the gospel that Paul preached. There is no good reason to think it means otherwise here, especially in light of the frequent warnings of this letter, some of which take even stronger expression than this. (2) The similar warning that moves toward exclusion in an earlier letter (2 Thess. 3:14–15), where the warning is precisely for those who "do not obey our instruction in this letter."

Thus, using traditional language whose origin is uncertain, Paul offers one last warning to those who persist in deviating from his gospel, and now especially to those who might refuse to obey the injunctions of this letter. He has just authenticated the letter with his signature. That leads him to assert their need to obey; but instead of putting it in terms of their obeying him, he puts it in the ultimate language of Christian obedience: "If anyone does not love the Lord." That, it would seem, covers the whole letter. To insist on human wisdom over against the gospel of the Crucified One is to "not love the Lord"; so with living in incest, attendance at idol feasts, and so forth. The ultimate issue for Paul, therefore, is not their obedience to his word, but their love, or lack thereof, for the Lord himself. Failure to obey Christ is lack of love for him; to reject him in this way is to place oneself under the *anathema*.

But what, then, is the meaning of *Maranatha*? This is a particularly complex issue, both because of the ambiguity as to its meaning in Aramaic and because of its place here in the letter. The Aramaic lying behind this Greek (and English) transliteration can be pointed either *Marana tha* (= "Our Lord, come!") or *Maran atha* (= "Our Lord has come"). In either case its use in a context like this can only be explained on the basis of its prior use in the Aramaic-speaking church, almost certainly in the context of worship. Whether or not it belonged to the "liturgy" of the Lord's Table in such an early setting is moot. If so, then it probably meant "Come, Lord" (as the NIV), and is to be understood as an early eschatological prayer, similar to that in Revelation ("Come, Lord Jesus" [22:20]). This is precisely its function in the concluding eucharistic prayers in the *Didache* (10:6).

But it is not certain that in this context Paul intended it as a prayer, or if he did, whether he intended it eschatologically. Some have argued that his intent is to reinforce the preceding "ban formula," as an invocation of the Lord's presence to hear and bear witness, as it were, to the pronounced *anathema*. It is also possible that it functions in this same capacity as an indicative. In light of the inherent warning in the words "if anyone love not the Lord, let that person be *anathema*," he concludes by affirming that the Lord whom they reject has indeed come.

At this distance, and especially with a word that would have had special significance for worship, one cannot be certain as to Paul's own intent. In light of its later use in the Didache, supported by the prayer at the end of the Revelation, it seems most likely that it is in fact an eschatological prayer. If so, in the present context it would seem to function as a response to the anathema on those who do not love the Lord, affirming that the Lord whom they reject is indeed coming, and those who do not love him are under the anathema and in danger of being rejected by Christ at his coming. It needs only to be added that this prayer is clear evidence that in the very earliest days the Aramaic-speaking church referred to Jesus by the title that in the OT belongs to God alone.34

23–24 All of Paul's letters conclude with the grace-benediction. The standard "good-bye" in ancient letters was *erroso* (lit., "be strong"),36 found in the NT in the letter of James (Acts 15:29). As with

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Paul's salutations, this standard conclusion is also Christianized. It is "grace," the favor of God that is theirs through "the Lord Jesus," that he wishes for them. Thus the letter begins with the salutation "Grace to you" and concludes the same way.39 Grace is the beginning and the end of the Christian gospel; it is the single word that most fully expresses what God has done and will do for his people in Christ Jesus; nothing is deserved, everything is freely given.

Given that reality, the concluding expression of Paul's own love for them is all the more striking. Most likely it is added to soften the blow of what at times, including what has immediately preceded (v. 22), have been very strong words. To write as he has does not mean he loves them less, but more. Thus, along with the benediction of grace from the Lord, he affirms that his own love is also "with them." It is more difficult to determine whether Paul here intends an indicative or an optative, but it matters little. His love is always "with them," hence he offers it to them as the final matter of this otherwise very strong letter, in which he and they have been at odds on almost every issue. What makes all of this possible are the final words of the letter, "in Christ Jesus." Just as the letter began (1:1–3), so he concludes, by reminding them that their common life together, and thus his love for them, takes place as they and he are together "in Christ Jesus."

Thus the letter ends on a note similar to its beginning, full of the same tensions between what they are by grace and what they yet need to become in terms of obedience to Christ. They are greeted with warmth, and assured of Christ's grace and Paul's love. Along with him they await the coming of the Lord. They should continue to greet one another with the kiss of love. However, they are not yet fully there, so even here there is the word of warning (v. 22). Christians must continually live in the tension between the "already" and the "not yet"; what they must not allow to happen is to excuse themselves from obedience because they are not yet fully there! The grace of the Lord and the hope of his coming should cause all to heed the words of this letter so as to be watchful and to do all things in love (vv. 13–14).[3]

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Mark A. Taylor, *1 Corinthians*, New American Commentary
Gordon Fee, *1 Corinthians*, New International Commentary of the New Testament (NICNT)
Anthony Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (NIGTC)
Leon Morris, *1 Corinthians*, Tyndale New Testament Commentary
Alan F. Johnson, *1 Corinthians*, IVP New Testament Commentary
David Prior, *The Message of 1 Corinthians*, The Bible Speaks Today
William Baker, *1 Corinthians*, Cornerstone Bible Commentary
Paul Ellingwroth and Howard A. Hatton, *A Handbook on 1 Corinthians*, UBSH

[3]Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, ed. Ned B. Stonehouse et al., Revised Edition, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014), 914–928.