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## GENUINE SPIRITUALITY: A STUDY OF 1 CORINTHIANS

#43

### LOVING THE LORD JESUS 1 CORINTHIANS 16:5-24

#### INTRODUCTION

We come to our concluding message of 1 Corinthians. Paul writes this letter as both an Apostle and a pastor; that explains why it covers so much ground. Gordon Fee notes that 1 Corinthians addresses *at least eleven different, somewhat desperate concerns, ten of which are behavioral*. That is the nature of pastoring; the church always stands in need of a course correction at some point or the other. As we have seen over the last year, the Corinthian church was riddled with problems. For example, they were seriously questioning Paul's authority to tell them how to live and this led to some internal divisions as each member tried to decide which leader best suited him. Furthermore, the church was infested with immorality and lawsuits. In addition, some in the church had decided that everyone would be better off single, rather than married. Some of the church's members were still frequenting the pagan temple's idolatrous feasts. Within the Corinthian church, the women began to usurp the men's authority in the worship gatherings. They even managed to misuse the spiritual gifts that the Spirit imparted to them as they competed with one another attempting to dominate the public gatherings of the church. These same worship gatherings had become chaotic and dishonoring to the Lord as the wealthy members of the church neglected the poor when they gathered for the Lord's Supper. Here they were eating gluttonously and getting drunk. One of the most serious problems in this church was their growing misunderstanding of the gospel as evidenced by some of the members denying the future resurrection of all believers.

Again and again, Paul has corrected their thinking on what it means to be genuinely spiritual, but now he will sum it up in one statement: *If anyone does not love the Lord, he is to be accursed Maranatha (v22)*. What is Paul's goal? It is to produce believers who are growing in their love for Jesus. And for Paul, love for Jesus is not some Gnostic idea that never manifests itself in the tangible world. In fact, Jesus taught us how love for Him manifests itself: *If you love Me, you will keep My commandments (John 14:15)*. Jesus also said, *34 "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. 35 "By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another (John 13:14-35)*." For both Jesus and Paul, to love Jesus is to love one another. This is why the Church is so incredibly important to both men; it is the community where our love for Jesus, or lack of love, is most evident. So how does this love become evident in the local church?

#### 1. LOVE FOR JESUS IS EVIDENT WHEN WE LOVE THOSE WHO REPRESENT JESUS TO THE LOCAL CHURCH

Paul planned to visit Corinth once again [4:18-21 & 16:5-7], but he could not immediately leave Ephesus due to ministry responsibilities there [16:8-9]. Paul anticipates that this letter will set the church aright, but to help with their present situation, Paul has dispatched Timothy, his trusted young assistant [4:16-17]. Now in his concluding remarks, he commands them to respectfully

receive him as one who is doing the Lord's work [16:10-11]. Later, Paul commends other church leaders and these actually come from the Corinthian's own congregation: *15Now I urge you, brethren (you know the household of Stephanas, that they were the first fruits of Achaia, and that they have devoted themselves for ministry to the saints), 16that you also be in subjection to such men and to everyone who helps in the work and labors. 17I rejoice over the coming of Stephanas and Fortunatus and Achaicus, because they have supplied what was lacking on your part. 18For they have refreshed my spirit and yours Therefore acknowledge such men.* Finally, in passing, Paul mentions at least three other recognized church leaders: Apollos [v12] and Aquila and Prisca [v19].

What we must notice is the importance Paul places on spiritual leaders within the local church. Obviously, Paul necessarily emphasizes his own authority as an Apostle, but he also demands that the Corinthians recognize and respect Timothy's pastoral authority because he is carrying on the work Paul began. Paul knows Timothy's weaknesses and yet he commends him to the church at Corinth because *he is doing the Lord's work*. Timothy was a timid man, even fearful [2 Timothy 1:7]. He was even ashamed of Paul due to Paul's frequent imprisonments [2 Timothy 1:8]. Paul vividly remembers Timothy's tears [2 Timothy 1:4] due to some ministry hardship no doubt. When writing to Timothy, Paul has to remind him to *kindle afresh the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and discipline (2 Timothy 1:6-7)*. I think if we had the opportunity to meet Timothy at that point in his life, his weaknesses would have been much more obvious than his strengths. Timothy's anxieties probably affected his digestive system which explains Paul's counsel to *No longer drink water exclusively, but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments (1 Timothy 5:23)*.

What jumps out from today's text is Paul's authoritative command that the church not make Timothy afraid (v10) and no one is to despise him (v11). Furthermore, Paul commanded the church to submit to such men as Stephanas (vv15-18) because *they have devoted themselves for ministry to the saints (v15)*. In spite of obvious deficiencies, Paul endorses such men as worthy of respect and even submission.

## **2. LOVE FOR JESUS IS EVIDENT WHEN WE LOVE INCREASINGLY IN OBEDIENCE TO THE COMMANDS OF SCRIPTURE**

In verses 13-14, Paul offers a five-fold summary of what he hopes the Corinthians, under their spiritual leaders, will become. *13Be on the alert, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong. 14Let all that you do be done in love.* First of all, they are to be alert. They are to know what's going on within themselves and their church. Willful ignorance is not an option. This is one reason God gives us spiritual leaders; they speak into our lives concerning specific sins which need to be confessed and forsaken. There is a kind of preaching which is so general it is not helpful at all. That is not what we find in the preaching of the Bible. If spiritual leaders are truly going to be helpful, they must be able to pierce us to the heart [Acts 2:37] so that we know what needs to be done. The faithful spiritual leader must call his people to flee from their sins to Jesus. Sinners must come to hate themselves as they presently are and seek refuge in Christ. Generalized preaching never accomplishes such necessary goals. Secondly, they are to *stand firm in the faith*. They must not forsake the one true faith in the risen Christ. In fact, everything they do must be done with eyes of faith. But in light of the threat of false teachers proclaiming "another gospel", they must remain steadfast in the true Gospel of Jesus Christ. Thirdly, they are to *act like men*. Fourthly, they are to *be strong*. Both of these commands address their need for a mature courage to face the difficulties within their own church. Running away is not an option. Fifthly and finally, they are

to do all things *in love*. Obeying this command alone would solve most of the problems addressed in this letter. Love is to characterize the believing community.

### **CONCLUSION**

Gordon Fee has written: *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.* This is the reality for every regenerate person here; we need to hear the Apostle so that we may become what God has already declared us to be by His grace. Thankfully, God has not left us to our own devices, instead, He gives us the Church and it is within this believing community that He desires to shape our lives. This should give us confidence in God's providential workings on our behalf. He has placed us here just as He placed the Corinthians in their local congregation and He is working out His purposes even as we struggle with sanctification. Like the Corinthians, God has called us into fellowship with His dear Son. And like the Corinthians, many of us need to grow up into a genuine spirituality. This growth happens within the context of the Church, not apart from it. So let us give thanks for Jesus and one another and let us grow into the men and women God has called us to be.