

Sermon outline and notes prepared by:
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1 Corinthians 16:15-24 “How to Express Love in the Fellowship”

Intro. One of the greatest needs that we all have is to be loved. When a person feels unloved, it leads to all sorts of problems. But when we love, and when we are loved by others, we tend to be healthy psychologically, and it even promotes physical health. So it should come as no surprise that the 2 greatest commandments in all of the Bible is to love God, and to love your neighbor (Mk. 12:30-31). And when you show love to others, you will usually find that love comes right back to you.

But how do we show love? After all, if love is just a feeling *we* have, that will do very little good for others. No, feelings of love will benefit someone else only when those feelings prompt us to show love in specific ways. So this morning we are going to look to our text, vv.15-24. Paul's love for the Corinthians overflows in the closing verses, and he gives some valuable insight into how to show love within a fellowship of believers. Love must not just be words or feelings, but it must be expressed in specific ways.

So I want to share with you 6 ways that we can show love to one another.

I. MINISTRY OR SERVICE TO EACH OTHER

In v.15 we read that the household of Stephanas “devoted themselves to the ministry of the saints.” “Ministry” is *diakonia* in Greek, and simply refers to service of most any kind. Here in this text Paul has in mind the kind of service that meets the needs of someone else. We should be sensitive to the needs of others, and do what we can to meet those needs. When you show love by serving someone, you are saying, “What can I do to help you?” Jesus said, “the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister....”

I want you to think with me some of the ways that we should minister to one another. God's people have many needs. Some have financial needs. This could result from persecution, sickness, or famine. In Mt. 25:34-40 Jesus spoke of people serving Him by ministering to the physical needs of His people. We have social needs that are met by some of the ways that we will talk about. We have spiritual needs, which are most important for us to meet by our service. Peter spoke of “the ministry of the Word” in Acts 6. As we teach the Word and pray for one another, we meet this very important need.

Now there are two main truths about ministry that I want you to see from our text:

A. The Priority of this Service – Notice that they “devoted themselves to the ministry of the saints.” Love and service should begin at home. Heb. 6:10 says, “For God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints, and do minister.” Gal. 6:10 says, “Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.”

B. The Initiative of Such Service - Notice that they “devoted themselves” to such ministry. The Gk. word [*tasso*] means “to set, appoint, assign, or designate” a specific person or group of persons to a specific work or office. But whereas it often refers to a work that someone

else appoints someone to do, here it is a case of Stephanas appointing himself, along with his household, to perform ministry to the saints. It can be translated, “they put themselves in line” for such service. They volunteered to serve. They served entirely on their own initiative with an eye only to the benefit resulting for others. Now it is perfectly appropriate for a church to assign ministries and responsibilities to its members, but Stephanas and his family and servants did not wait to be appointed or asked. They spontaneously assigned themselves to help meet any need they saw among the saints. I believe that that is the way it should be if God’s Spirit is really working in a church. In a Spirit-filled church, any time a need arises, someone will step forward to meet that need, regardless of whether or not they hold a formal office.

Ministries in a church often start out this way. People see a need, and they work to meet that need. If the need is too great for them to handle, they pray and ask for other workers to join them in meeting the need. That’s how the deacon ministry started in Acts 6.

Do you see needs in our church, or in our community that are not being met? Are you taking any initiative to meet those needs? We should be ready and willing to minister to the physical needs, social needs, and spiritual needs of people. That includes visiting and praying for the sick. It includes helping someone who has a financial need. Another example is found in v.16. Paul speaks of “everyone who works ... with us.” literally means “to work together with”, which often involves helping someone else in some task. Sometimes people just need a helping hand!

A man fell into a pit and could not get out. A Pharisee said, "Only bad people fall into a pit." A news reporter wanted the exclusive story on his experience. A self-pitying person said, "You haven't seen anything until you've seen my pit!" An optimist said, “things could be worse.” A pessimist said, “things will get worse.” Jesus seeing the man, took him by the hand and lifted him out of the pit.¹ So show you love. See a need; lend a hand.

Another way that we show our love is through:

II. SUBMISSION

In v.16 Paul exhorted the Corinthian church, “that you also submit to such, and to everyone who works and labors with us.” There is surely a play on words here. “Devoted themselves” is *tasso* in Gk., and “submit” is from *hupotasso*. The first verb means to put oneself in line to do something, and the other is a military term. It means to get in line under the orders of someone.

Notice the kind of people we should submit to in the church. Paul plainly says that we should submit to such men as Stephanas “and to everyone who works and labors with us.” Jesus said, “Whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant...; just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many” (Mt. 20:26-28). Stephanas sought to serve, not rule, but it is to such servant-leaders that we should submit. So the kind of authority Paul endorses is authority that is earned through humble service, not imposed merely by holding an office.

Now here’s the point. When we have people in the church who take the initiative to work hard at meeting needs, we should respond in at least 2 ways. First, we should take note of these kinds of people, as Paul says in the first part of v.15, and in v.18b. Then, we are to submit to their leadership. The kind of loving submission described here is voluntary, not forced. We

¹ Pulpit Helps Illustration Collection II.

submit to such people by respecting them, and by heeding their counsel, advice, leadership, and admonition.

Submission to authority is a key evidence of the Spirit-filled life (Eph. 5:18-21). As we learn to submit to God, we will have little difficulty submitting to any authority that God places over us, be it in the government, the church, or the home. Lack of submission to such authority is a sign of rebellion against God. If we do not submit to earthly authority, then we will have trouble submitting to God as well.

So one of the ways we show our love to someone is by submitting to them. A child demonstrates love for his parents by submitting. A wife demonstrates love for her husband by submitting to his leadership. And church members demonstrate love and appreciation to the leaders of a church by submitting to them.

Another way that we show our love is through:

III. COMPANIONSHIP

If you want to show your love for someone, spend time with them. Paul said in vv.17-18a, “I am glad about the coming of Stephanas, Fortunatus,² and Achaicus, for what was lacking on your part they supplied. For they refreshed my spirit and yours.” Paul was grateful that his 3 friends had come from Corinth to be with him. They talked with Paul and no doubt discussed the Lord’s work in Corinth. They genuinely befriended Paul, by being with him, by encouraging him, and by identifying with His ministry. And so the main ingredient of companionship is togetherness; it cannot be experienced from a distance or secondhand.

Notice one of the main outcomes of such companionship: refreshment [*anapauo*]. One of the finest compliments we can be paid is for our Christian friends to say that we are refreshing to be around. Paul’s friends helped the hard-pressed apostle find rest and refreshment. Christian companionship brings comfort and encouragement. God can comfort us directly, but He often chooses to comfort us through others. In 2 Cor. 7:6 Paul said, “God, who comforts the depressed, comforted us by the coming of Titus.” Companionship also helps in preventing us from falling into sin or from losing heart. One of the surest ways we can get into spiritual trouble is by neglecting fellowship with other believers.

Do you have a grandparent, or parent, or someone else who is lonely, and who needs to be visited? Can you say you love them if you neglect to visit them, and spend time with them? James 1:27 says, “Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble....” Jesus said in Matthew 25:36, “...I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me....” I believe we should set some goals for spending time with those we love. And our visitation program has been lacking. I hope this will prompt more of you to go visiting with us on Tuesday nights.

Another way that we show our love is through:

IV. HOSPITALITY

Paul says in the last of v.19, “Aquila and Priscilla greet you heartily in the Lord, with the church that is in their house.” Hospitality does not seem to be practiced as much today as in the past. People are so busy, and housekeeping & having people over seems to be less common. But it was practiced on a regular basis in the early church as one way of showing love and

² Fortunatus was a Hellenistic name often adopted by a freed slave (Meaning “fortunate”) – Blomberg.

ministering to the saints. We know from Acts 18 that when Paul first came to Corinth, he stayed with Aquila and Priscilla. They were hospitable then. And several years later we find that they had moved to Ephesus, where they opened their home for the church to use as a meeting place. In the early church the homes of believers were used for almost every type of Christian activity. In this case Paul probably had in mind such activities as teaching and preaching, worship, fellowship, etc. The early church often met in homes that were large enough to accommodate a fairly large group.³

Hospitality was also commonly practiced for Christians who traveled. When Christians traveled from place to place in New Testament times, they could expect, almost without exception, to be entertained with great care and love by fellow Christians. Every Christian home today should be an open, transparent, and loving haven for those who need hospitality.

One ministry that I can fondly remember from by days as a young person was the ministry of members opening their homes to the youth group. One of the youth leaders in particular would frequently have the youth group over to his house. We had some great times of Bible study and fellowship there. At other times we would meet in different homes after church on Sunday evening. That was a great ministry to the younger saints of God.

Have you practiced hospitality to other saints of God? Have you ever invited a new member over to fellowship over a meal?

Another way that we show our love is through:

V. AFFECTION

In v.20 Paul says, “All the brethren greet you. Greet one another with a holy kiss.” One mark of love in the early church was the way they greeted each others with loving touch. We human beings need physical contact, and gestures of affection. So here in our text Paul writes of Christians greeting one another. When you are separated by miles, you can only greet one another in words, as was the case in v.19 with the Ephesian Christians. But when we have opportunity, we are to show love by greeting one another with a loving gesture. The Greek word translated “greet” literally meant “to draw to one’s self.” In New Testament times they would embrace and kiss one another on the cheek. (See also Rom. 16:16; 2 Cor. 13:12; I Th. 5:26; I Pet. 5:14). That kind of greeting was very common and acceptable in that eastern culture. It dates back very far among Oriental people. Even today in some parts of eastern Europe and the Middle East, men greet one another with a kiss on the cheek as a sign of love and affection. We saw some of that on our trip to Israel, Jordan, & Egypt. Everett and I were walking in a shopping mall near our motel one night in Jordan, and we saw two guys walking together, holding hands. We thought we had gone to the wrong part of town! But we found out that that does not mean the same thing there as it does here!

I do not believe that we must obey this command in just the same way. Each culture will greet differently. In western culture a handshake or a warm embrace or hug is our way of expressing affection between believers. Even a kiss on the cheek is not out of order if it is a “holy” kiss. A church is a spiritual family, and we should experience warmth and affection among brothers and sisters in Christ. That is why Rom. 12:10 says, “Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love....” In most of the Church today the danger is in showing too little affection rather than too much.

³ These smaller groups would meet together on a large scale from time to time (11:18, 20; 14:23), where we do not know, but perhaps in the open air.

The more difficult application of this principle of love has to do with cross-gender greetings. Paul does say “Greet one another.” That seems pretty inclusive. And one may wonder why he would need to add the modifier “holy” if the kiss on the cheek never crossed to the opposite gender. 1 Timothy 5:2 gives us the bottom line. There Paul says we should treat “older women as mothers, younger as sisters, with all purity.” And men, if you are going to use this verse as an excuse to start kissing women in church, then you had better be prepared to do the same to other men, if you dare!

I believe we need to be careful that everyone within our church is greeted with some sign of affection. Don’t exclude anyone. Paul said, “Greet one another” not “greet your close friends.” Our visitors should be greeted warmly. When we come to God’s house, we ought to become acquainted with people we don’t know. Let it be known that Swift Creek Baptist Church has this mark of love. The church ought to be the friendliest place in the community. Furthermore, if there is someone you cannot greet, then there is sin in your life.

We should certainly apply this principle of love to our own earthly families. Husbands and wives should certainly be affectionate with each other. Yet 56% of women say their pets are more affectionate than their partners. Not only that, but 45% of women say their pets are cuter than their partners!⁴ Fathers, you should hug your daughter. And children should hug & kiss their parents. I remember a time when I was a teenager that I didn’t want to be seen hugging my own mother. Young people, you’re never too old to hug your mother!

By the way, another reason we should obey this command is due to the benefit we and others receive. Hugging is the cheapest medicine available to us today. It relieves many physical and emotional problems. It reduces stress. Stress is one of the main contributors to illness. Furthermore, researchers discovered that when a person is touched, the amount of hemoglobin in their blood increases significantly. And babies who are given all the nutrition they need but receive no physical contact grow less, cry more, and come down with all types of illness & disease. So you really should be giving and receiving hugs!⁵

Finally, yet another way that we show our love is through:

VI. WORDS

I said at the beginning of my message that our love should not be *only* words, but it should not exclude words either. We do show love by our words. That reminds me of the old story of a wife who was frustrated by the fact that her husband never would tell his wife that he loved her. But he explained it by saying, “Honey, I told you when I married you that I loved you. If I ever change my mind, you will be the first to know.” Well, that is not good enough. That man needed to show his love to his wife by more frequent words of love!

Now there are several ways we show love by our words.

A. Words of Appreciation - Paul says in the last of v.18, “Therefore acknowledge such men.” “Acknowledge” [*epiginosko*] signifies recognition of someone for something they have done, and expressing appreciation. Paul is not commanding us to give out plaques all the time. He is simply calling for respect and appreciation, which sometimes will be public and sometime private. Proper appreciation of deserving persons in the church not only is not wrong but is

⁴ BizRate Research in *Readers Digest*, Sept. 2005, p. 223.

⁵ Kevin Trudeau, *Natural Cures “They” Don’t Want You to Know About* (Elk Grove Village, IL: Alliance Publishing Group, 2004), 169. Also, Helen Colton, *The Joy of Touching*.

pleasing to the Lord. 1 Th. 5:12-13a says, “And we urge you, brethren, to recognize those who labor among you, and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love for their work’s sake.”

Epaphroditus was the sort of godly person to be imitated and acknowledged. Paul said, “Therefore receive him in the Lord with all joy and hold men like him in high regard” (Phil. 2:29).

Family members should show appreciation for one another. Children should show appreciation to their parents. Husbands and wives should show appreciation to one another. And parents should even show appreciation to their children for some of the things they do as well!

B. Words of Rebuke & Warning – Many times in 1 Cor. Paul rebuked the Corinthians for their sinful actions and attitudes. But love compelled him to do so. Jesus said in Rev. 3:19, “As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten....” Love meets needs, and sometimes we need rebuke, though we must rebuke the right way.

Also, rebuke and correction is often followed by warning. Paul said in v.22, “If anyone does not love the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be accursed.” What a strong warning! Some of the Corinthians were living in such a way that Paul could wonder if they really loved Jesus. [Note *phileo* here. See Lenski, p.786]. Some people’s love for Jesus is all talk, and no substance. And so Paul warns them that if they don’t love Jesus, they will be “Anathema”, which is a Gk. word meaning, “Devoted to destruction.” This does not constitute a command for any sort of action on the part of the church. The warning is against those whose lack of love for the Lord demonstrates that they are not true believers. He thus warns all unbelievers of the eternal destruction that await them. Every unbeliever should heed such a warning.

And then notice that Anathema is followed by Maranatha, which means, “Our Lord, come.” The second coming of Christ is the hope and longing of the Christian, and the woe to everyone who does not love the Lord. That’s because Christ’s coming will bring salvation to the saved and damnation to the lost. The unloving heart is always ill at ease in the presence of Him whom it does not love. What woe! In love Paul warns people to trust in Christ before it is eternally too late.

C. Words of Assurances of Love - Even though Paul had rebuked them in this letter, he closes with an assurance of his love for them by some tender words. He says in v.24, “My love be with you all in Christ Jesus.” In no other letter does he end with this kind of statement of his love, but it was profoundly needed for the Corinthians. Even though most of the marks of love have to do with what we do, we still need to remember that one way we show our love is by saying, “I love you.” Paul gives a great example of that as he concludes his letter.

Parents, when you must discipline your children, be sure that assurances of love both in word and deed follow your discipline. And husbands in particular need to express words of love for our wives. The greatest sin in the universe is one-sided or unexpressed love.

The great writer Thomas Carlyle had a wife who worshiped him, and yet he hardly made any time for her. He was so involved in his work that he barely even acknowledged her love and expressions of gratitude. She did little things for him and really loved herself to death. After she died, Carlyle was depressed and began to thumb through her diary. There he read, "I heard his footsteps today, and it thrilled my heart that I could see him for a few moments again" and "I did his shirt for him today and it was the joy of my life to do something for my beloved." Page after page contained expressions of her love. Finally, Carlyle threw the diary down and ran to the

graveyard. He fell across her grave and with tears streaming down his face cried out, "Darling, if I had only known." [Vines, p.271-72]. Well, he should have known, and he should have expressed his love for his wife much more often. Oh, don't wait until your loved one dies before you express your love for them!

Sources: Craig Blomberg, *The NIV Application Commentary: 1 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994); R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's First and Second Epistles to the Corinthians* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1937); John F. MacArthur, Jr., *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: 1 Corinthians* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1984); Alexander Maclaren, *Expositions of Holy Scripture*, Vol. 14 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977 reprint); Paige Patterson, *The Troubled Triumphant Church: an Exposition of First Corinthians* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1983); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible [CD-ROM]* (Ontario: Timnathserah Inc., 1996); Jerry Vines, *God Speaks Today: A Study of 1 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979). Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).