

INTRODUCTION

This message is about giving money to the Lord. Because I preach through the Bible verse after verse, when we come to a passage that talks about giving, that's what we're going to talk about. And I'm aware that the most sensitive nerve in the human body is the nerve that goes from a person's heart to their wallet or to their purse.

And some people say all I ever preach about is giving money to the Lord. Well, most of you know that that's not true. I usually preach on it once a year. Giving money to the Lord is a part of who we are. And sometimes an offering becomes just sort of a routine. Jim Henry, who's the pastor of First Baptist Church, Orlando, Florida, and a friend of mine, likes to tell the story about how he was flying on a Delta jet one day. And they had some engine problems and they were going to have to make an emergency landing. And several people on the plane knew him and knew he was a pastor. And as they were trying to get prepared to go into crash landing positions, everybody was really afraid. And somebody said to him out loud so that everybody in the cabin could hear it. They said, "Dr. Henry, you're a preacher, aren't you?" He said, "Yes, I am." And they said, "Well, would you do something religious?" So Jim Henry said they took an offering up!

Well, it's more than just something religious that we do. It reminds me of the little boy I heard about who came home one afternoon. And he had an ice cream in either hand, licking on one and licking on the other. And his mother said, "Where in the world did you get that ice cream?" And he said, "Well, I went down to the ice cream store, and the lady gave it to me free." And his mother said, "She gave it to you free? She never does anything like that. How did you get that ice cream?" He said, "I put an ice cream cone in this hand. And then I put another ice cream cone in this hand. And then I said to the lady to reach into my pocket and get the money. And I told her please don't disturb my pet snake. And you know? She gave me that ice cream."

Sometimes people have various ways of trying to get what they want. The good news is that when it comes to financing God's work, we don't have to beg people. We don't have to coerce people. We don't have to trick people, because the Bible gives some principles on how we ought to give. First Corinthians 16:1-4 says:

Now about the collection for the Lord's people: Do what I told the Galatian churches to do. ² 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. ³ Then, when I arrive, I will give letters of introduction to the men you approve and send them with

your gift to Jerusalem. ⁴ If it seems advisable for me to go also, they will accompany me.

I want to give you six words to describe from this passage of scripture how every child of God, every believer, ought to give money to the Lord.

1. Purposeful

First of all, your financial giving should be purposeful. It should have a purpose for which you give. Now, we know that in this passage of scripture, the purpose for which they gave was to relieve the suffering of some of the other believers in Jerusalem. Jerusalem was where the church was born. Many of you know, or you may not know, that today is Pentecost Sunday. It's the birthday of the church. This is the day that we celebrate the starting of the Christian Church, because it was on the day of Pentecost that the Holy Spirit fell and the church was formed.

Well, that church in Jerusalem became the central church. But Jesus said, "I don't want you to stay in Jerusalem. I want you to go into Judea, Samaria, the utter most parts of the earth." But the people in Jerusalem didn't do that. They just stayed there. And the Bible says in Acts chapter eight that there was persecution in the church. They began to be persecuted, and they were scattered. It's kind of like God said, "Hey, if you don't do what I tell you to do, I'll make sure that you're scattered and persecuted." And he scattered Christians all over the world. Now what remained in Jerusalem was a smaller group of Christians. These Christians continued to be persecuted, many of them lost their jobs. Many of them couldn't get jobs because they were Christians. And so many of the Christians in Jerusalem were suffering in destitute poverty.

And so Paul had an idea. He said, I tell you what we'll do. We'll take up an offering in the other churches. And we'll take that offering to Jerusalem, to these brothers and sisters in Christ. And we'll say here, we love you so much that we've taken up an offering to meet your needs.

That was the purpose for which they were giving. Now, when you make your offering to the Lord through your church, are you giving for a real specific purpose? Or do you just sort of write your check out or drop your dollar in the plate or put your coins in the plate with no apparent purpose? What is the purpose for which you give? When you give \$1 to our church, it's going to go in a lot of different directions.

I've told you this before, but 14 cents of that dollar is going to go around the world here in Texas and around the world in terms of missions. And so that's one purpose that you give. The rest of it is going to do a lot of things locally here in our own church. When you give, you should be saying, "This is the reason, this is the purpose, that I am giving." A lot of the money that you give goes to feed hungry

people locally here and around the world. And so all your giving should be for a purpose.

2. Punctual

Number two, your financial giving should be punctual. In other words, it ought to be a regular time that you give, punctually, right on time. And what is that time? Look at verse two. It says on the first day of the week. What did the early Christians do on the first day of the week? Well, they met to worship to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus.

There are a lot of people who are still confused. They think that Sunday is the Sabbath. It's not. The Jewish Sabbath was on Saturday, and that's when the Jews would meet in their synagogues to worship. And the early Christians in Jerusalem would usually meet with the other Jewish friends on the Sabbath, on Saturday, and worship at the temple. And then on Sunday they would have their special celebrations. And did you know that for about the first 60 or 70 years of the Christian Church, Christianity was just kind of a sect, a division of Judaism?

It wasn't until about 98 that the Jews made it illegal to be a Jew and to be a Christian. And so these Christians were meeting on the first day of the week to celebrate the resurrection because Jesus was discovered to be alive on the first day of the week, Sunday. So isn't Sunday the Christian Sabbath? No, you don't find that anywhere in the Bible. Find me chapter and verse. The Bible never says that the Sabbath changed from Saturday to Sunday. Sunday is the day that we as Christians celebrate the resurrection, but you don't have to do it only on Sunday. I was talking with the family that's joining our church tonight. And while they were living in Egypt, they told me that the church met on Fridays there. You know why? Because in Muslim countries, Friday is the day when nobody works and they worked on Saturday and Sunday. So they worshiped on Friday. Is that okay? Absolutely.

Did you know it's a good time to worship the Lord any day? But we know that without a doubt, the early Christians met at least the first day of the week. And that's when he said, "I want you to bring your offering." Now, how punctual are you on giving? When was the last time you gave some money to the Lord? Are you in the good habit of regularly, every Sunday, giving something to the Lord's work? Why should you give something every Sunday to the Lord's work?

Well, I'll give you a real simple reason why you ought to: because the Bible says to. It says on the first day of the week, that's when you give. Did you know that we have a weekly budget here at our church? There's a certain amount of money that we're trusting God's people to give to carry on the ministry of the church. And every week we track it, and we usually stay a little bit behind on that weekly budget. I've heard some people say, "I give whenever the Holy Spirit leads me to give." That is a real spiritual answer. But the word of God says in black and white

that on the first day of the week, you bring an offering to the Lord. You don't have to wait until the Spirit leads. You just have to obey.

Giving like a lot of things in the Christian life; it is just an act of obedience that you do. You don't have to wait to be led to do something that the word of God tells you to do.

3. Personal

Paul says on the first day of *every* week, *each* one of you is to give. When was the last time that you gave something? No believer is exempt from giving to the Lord. Now, kids, you may not have but a nickel to give. Great. Give it. Teenagers may not have, but a dollar to give, but that's all right. Give it. It says each one of you; nobody is exempt from it.

Don't you think that if Jesus would have exempted anybody from giving financially, it would have been that widow in the temple? He saw this widow put in her two mites worth one-half penny, and then you know what he said? He said this woman has given all she has. That was her total income. She gave it to the Lord's work, and Jesus was blessed by it. Don't you think that if Jesus would have exempted anybody from giving, he would have reached over there in that treasury, taken those two mites and handed it to that poor widow? Wouldn't he say, "Bless your heart. Thanks for the thought. But you need this more than the Lord does. You take it." But he didn't do that at all. Instead he praised his Father because this poor woman gave all she had.

Any of you feel like you're kind of exempt from giving? If I read this right, it says every one of you should give something. You know, at my last church, we had something really interesting. We had a big worship service every Wednesday night called Wow. We asked everybody there every Wednesday night to give something in the offering. And many times I'd say, "If you don't have anything to give tonight, if you're totally broke, turn to the person next to you and get them to give you something so you can give." And just about every Wednesday night, we'd have over a thousand people put something in the offering plate, whether it was a penny or whether it was \$10 or a hundred dollars or a thousand dollars. Everybody put something in the offering plate. And you wouldn't believe the spirit that existed when they did that.

What do you do when the offering plate passes in front of you? Is it an exciting experience for you or just something you just kind of pass by? Nobody is exempt from it. Poor people aren't exempt from it. Rich people aren't exempt from it. When Jesus had dinner in the home of Zacchaeus, who was a wealthy man, he said, "I know what I'll do. I'll pay back everybody. And those that I've stolen from, I'll pay them back fourfold." Jesus, didn't say he didn't need to do that. He knew that Zach had plenty. And he said, "That's a good thing to do."

People often ask me how many members of our church we have. And I get tired of saying, "Well, on paper we have about 9,000, but the FBI couldn't find about half of them." And that's true. We don't even know where they are, but their name is just on the roll. They're somewhere out there thinking they're going to get to heaven because their name is on the church roll. Let's just say about 4,500 people come some of the time during the year. And that's probably perhaps pretty realistic. Out of that 4,500 number, do you know how many of that number give absolutely zero that at least is accounted for? I mean, they may drop some money in the plate, but if they don't have an offering envelope, it's not tracked. About 2000 of that number give absolutely nothing. And so what you've got is just a small number of people giving a little bit. That's amazing when the Bible says on the first day of the week, every one of you should give something.

I heard about a pastor who had a guy in his church who was sort of a new Christian and a hard-fisted businessman. He got fired up for Jesus and noticed that there were a lot of people who didn't give anything. And so this guy went to his pastor and he said, "I'm disturbed because we've got a lot of people on our rolls who don't ever come to church and don't ever give a dime. And I want to do something about it. Pastor, would you give me a mailing list of the inactive members of your church? And let me write them a note." The pastor said sure, but he didn't know what he wrote. Then the pastor got a letter in the mail from one of those inactive members. It said, "Dear pastor, I realized that I've not been as active as I should have been, and I've not been attending services lately." (And by the way, they all thought this letter was from the pastor. This businessman signed the pastor's name to it.) The letter continued, "I got your letter. I should have been more active in church, but I haven't been attending services lately. I am enclosing a check for \$1,000, and I assure you that I'll be back in church this Sunday. And he signed his name, followed by "P.S. Would you please tell your secretary that there's only one T in the word dirty? And there's no C in the word skunk?"

There's a lot of different ways to try to get people to give. But the best way is just to do what the Bible says.

4. Proportional

Verses two and three talk about giving in keeping with your income. In other words, your giving should be proportional. Those that make more, should give more. And those that make less, are free to give less. It means that not everybody could give the same amount. I've often been in a church meeting or committee meeting or deacons meeting or finance committee meeting. And we talk about how we may need \$50,000 for something. And I've often heard people say, "Well, let's just ask a thousand people to give \$50 and there's your \$50,000." And they figure that's a good way to handle it. That's a terrible way to handle it! For some people to give \$50, that is just a drop in the bucket. They'll blow more than that on a meal at

Outback. But for other people to give \$50 on a fixed income, that is a terrible sacrifice. It's not fair. So you'll never hear us say for everybody to just bring a hundred dollars this Sunday, or everybody give \$50. That's not the way God tells us to give.

The Bible says everybody ought to give proportionally according to your income. And if God has blessed you with more, you'll be blessed when you give more. And if God hasn't blessed you with much, you'll be blessed when you give a little. It ought to be proportional. That is why in the Old Testament, we're taught this concept of the tithe and giving 10%. As Christians, we've made such a big deal out of giving 10%, but that is just a starting point; it is just an Old Testament standard. What does the New Testament teach about tithing? Jesus did not say tithing was done away with. He said that the Pharisees and the scribes even tithed the spices in their kitchen. Jesus said, "You ought to have done that. But you ought to have not left the weightier things undone, like truth and justice."

Now what he's saying there is tithing is just a minor accomplishment in the Christian life; all the Pharisees tithed. And remember what Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount to Christians? He said, "Unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you'll never even see him." How many of you are doing at least what the Jewish Pharisees did... giving at least a tithe? Well, Jesus said, unless what you do exceeds what they do, you'll never make it into heaven. But that's where we get the concept of the tithe, because it is a proportional amount.

But you know, the tithe is not the very best final standard. It's only a good starting point. I'll tell you why. Here's a lady on a fixed income. All she gets is her Social Security check and maybe a little pension. She gets \$500 a month and she faithfully writes that tithe of \$50 a month. Maybe she gives \$10 a week, \$12 a week. What does it leave her with for the month? \$450. You folks know it's tough to live on \$450 a month. These days it's almost impossible.

Here's somebody else who makes \$10,000 a month. They write out a check for a thousand dollars. What does it leave them to live on for the month? \$9,000? Is that completely fair? Not at all. Same to you. The tithe is just a starting point. And for those that don't have a whole lot to give, it may be a good starting point. But for those who've been blessed with a lot, don't you sit there complacently and say, "Well, I tithe all God expects me to do." He says to give according to your income. It ought to be proportional.

5. Planned

Verse 2 talks about setting money aside. What does that mean? It means that you need to adjust your spending and your personal budget so you can plan. So you'll have the right amount of money to give to the Lord. You have to plan it in

advance. You say, "This is what I'm going to give. And so I have to plan all my other spending around this." How many times does the Lord get the leftovers these days? I was in a bookstore the other day in the cooking section. I saw the title of a new book that said *Miracles with Leftovers*. That's the handbook of every church I know of because every church is performing their ministry with people's leftovers. You know what I'm talking about? You get out your checkbook, you start paying bills for the month, then you look at what you have left over and you say, "Oh, can I give to the Lord this month? How much can I give to the Lord? Or how little can I get away with giving to the Lord this month?" That's the wrong way, to give him your leftovers. Paul is saying if you want to give the right amount, you have to save it up. You have to plan in advance. Paul uses a word that means a treasury of money. What it means is you ought to save up your money to give to the Lord. Are you doing that?

6. Practical

You don't just give and say, "Hey, that's it. I'm not going to worry about it." You need to be practical enough to make sure that the money you give to the Lord's work is handled properly. I want you to see what Paul said about that in verses three and four. He said, "When I arrive, I'll give letters of introduction to the man you approve and send them with your gift to Jerusalem." Now, would you agree with me that in many cases in the past money that's been given for religious purposes has been mishandled and misappropriated? All you have to do is turn on the TV news about so-called ministries that have milked people out of millions of dollars. And there's been really no accounting for how the money was spent. You know what I'm talking about? People who think that they're giving money to an orphanage down in Haiti are actually going for the corporate jet of this guy that's raising the money. That's not practical giving.

What I want to say to you is that you ought to give in such a way that you're practical enough to know where that money is going. I don't have any hesitation at all to stand before you as pastor and tell you that every dollar that's given to the work of this church can be tracked and traced where it is spent. That is why we have a budget. That is why we have a financial statement. That's why we have men and women trusted by the congregation who've been elected. We call those our deacons and our finance committee whose job it is to make sure we're being good stewards of the Lord's money. That's what Paul's saying. He said, "Don't just give me the money. That's not practical. I want you to choose some men. [You notice it's plural. You don't trust any one individual. There's always safety in numbers.] And they'll take that gift to Jerusalem." What really happens to the money that you give to the Lord? Jesus said do not store up treasures on earth, where moth and rust corrupt, but store your treasures in heaven.

CONCLUSION

I want to finish by reading something just wonderful that Marshall Edwards wrote about a man by the name of John Ruskin. John gave a hundred when the offering plate was passed that Sunday morning He said to his money, "I'll see you in heaven." Some people seated next to him overheard John Ruskin. And they said, "Oh, he's just getting old." Later, they told their friends what they had heard old John say. And they said, as they laughed, "He'll find that money in a lot of places, but he'll never see that money in heaven." Old John Ruskin went to heaven, alright. Never doubted that he would, for there was no finer man in the church. It was a pity that there were not more people like him when the heart attack claimed his life. The very next Sunday afternoon, everybody was certain that John was in heaven, but not with his money.

You see something happened to his offering. \$70 of that \$100 never even got out of his hometown. Some of it ended up in the electric company's bank account because the church used a lot of electricity for their lights and air conditioning. Bill Adams, the church janitor, spent some of it after collecting his salary. A service station operator put a little of the money in his cash register. After the preacher bought gas for his car, that \$30 that left his hometown went to some strange places. Some went to Nashville, Tennessee, to buy literature from the Sunday school board to be used by the church Sunday school workers. A small amount went to a nearby Baptist college. The treasurers of the Baptist seminaries didn't know it, but some of John's hundred dollars passed through their hands. When they paid the salaries of the seminary professors, several dollars were soon in the bank being exchanged for some peculiar-looking foreign currency.

This money was for overseas mission work. They were told it would be difficult to say exactly where all of John's money went. Not that detailed records weren't available. It just scattered in so many different places. But one thing was certain. The church members were concerned that money certainly didn't go to heaven, but John wasn't worried. It took a little time, but he recovered every dollar. The first one came into dramatic fashion. One day in heaven, a man warmly embraced John and shook his hand. "Thank you. Thank you. Thank you," he said. It seems that this man had been a lonely fella down on earth. He didn't have much to do with anybody, and no one had much to do with him. That was before he was walking by the church one Sunday night and saw the lights on in the church. "I was so lonely and tired that night," he said, "I just went into the church to get out of the dark for a while, but when I left my spiritual darkness was gone. During the service I became a Christian because you paid the light bill." "Hmm, thought John, "I guess I got more out of that electricity than the electric company did." The next return on his investment was a surprise. Even to John. He'd expected a return, but not the way it happened. He was greeted by the young fellow who used to run the service station, where the pastor bought gas. He told John that he and the preacher talked a lot while the gas tank was being filled. "That preacher finally led me to Christ," he

said. “More will come from that money,” said John. “All those visits a car helped the preacher make will bring more souls in before long.” I hadn't even thought of the service station fella. Soon it was a steady stream. Men, women, boys, girls, won to the Lord by young ministers, just out of seminary. Sunday school teachers grateful for the help good literature gave them in teaching the Bible. People wearing strange dress who had learned about Jesus from the missionaries. All had a big thank you for John. And to this day, John Ruskin is still collecting his money. There are some people who think that John wasted his money by putting it in the offering plate, especially when all it went for was to pay for the electricity, the salaries of the staff for missions, and other such ordinary things. I got such a blessing when I read that because it made me realize that every dollar that you give with the right motive, one day you'll see the fruit and the results in heaven.

OUTLINE

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INTRODUCTION

Paul's relationship with the church at Corinth was tenuous. Paul spins the entire letter, all 15 chapters, admonishing them, castigating them, and saying there's some real problems in that church. When he comes here to the end of this letter, he begins to make some personal remarks. If you could read somebody's mail, you could learn a lot about them. Paul makes some very personal remarks in this letter, and we learn a lot about him just from reading his mail.

First Corinthians 16:5-14 says:

After I go through Macedonia, I will come to you—for I will be going through Macedonia. ⁶ Perhaps I will stay with you for a while, or even spend the winter, so that you can help me on my journey, wherever I go. ⁷ For I do not want to see you now and make only a passing visit; I hope to spend some time with you, if the Lord permits. ⁸ But I will stay on at Ephesus until Pentecost, ⁹ because a great door for effective work has opened to me, and there are many who oppose me. ¹⁰ When Timothy comes, see to it that he has nothing to fear while he is with you, for he is carrying on the work of the Lord, just as I am. ¹¹ No one, then, should treat him with contempt. Send him on his way in peace so that he may return to me. I am expecting him along with the brothers. ¹² Now about our brother Apollos: I strongly urged him to go to you with the brothers. He was quite unwilling to go now, but he will go when he has the opportunity. ¹³ Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be courageous; be strong. ¹⁴ Do everything in love.

I. PAUL'S CHARACTER

In these personal remarks that he makes, we learn something about Paul's character. And I think that we would all agree that the apostle Paul was one of the most usable servants God has ever had in the kingdom, because he was such an effective servant of the Lord. We can learn some things about his character that we want to emulate. In fact, it was the apostle Paul who said to “be imitators of me.”

1. Make bold plans

Paul says, “I'm coming to Macedonia, or I may go somewhere else. And when I come, I'm going to stay there. I may stay the winter with you. And then I may stay in Ephesus for a while.” He's already planned out his future itinerary, his future ministry. I say that because there are some people that say you don't really need to make plans. You just need to trust God. I want you to know that the apostle Paul was the kind of guy that would have carried a daytimer with him all the time. He

would have kept all of his appointments up to date. The Bible says we ought to make plans. James chapter four says you must be careful when you make plans. If you leave God out of your plans, you're in trouble, but we need to make plans. A good friend of mine was talking about our long-range planning committee in this church, and he said he didn't believe in making plans. He didn't think we should have a planning committee in our church.

I said, "Why not?" He said, "Because I don't think you have to. You ought to make plans. You ought to just trust God." Did you know when Paul wrote to the Christians in Rome, he said he hoped to go beyond Rome, even to Spain. Spain was the Western-most part of the civilized world at that time, Paul says, "I want to go to the ends of the earth. I'm going to make some bold plans. How about you?"

Have you made any plans about what you're going to be doing for the Lord? You heard about the old man who stopped at a country store to get a Coca-Cola. And he looked on the side of this old barn and there were a lot of bullseye targets. And in the center of every bullseye was a bullet hole. He was standing there drinking his Coke, and he mentioned to another old fellow sitting there, "Well, somebody around here is an expert marksman. Look at that. There's a bullet hole in every target." The old fellow laughed and said, "Not exactly. We shoot the bullet holes first. And we draw the target around that!"

Some people live that way. They don't make any plans, and wherever they end up, they say that was the plan. I believe that you ought to make bold plans for God. This is what I'm planning on doing. Some say you should just sit back and wait on the Lord, and he'll direct and guide you. The phrase "wait on the Lord"...especially in Isaiah 40... is not a passive waiting. It is an active verb. Waiters are actively serving people and saying, "How can I help you? How's your food? Can I get you anything else?" That's what it means to wait on the Lord, to be active and available to the Lord.

I firmly believe that God best uses people who are moving in a certain direction. Now God may change your direction, but if you're moving along, it's easier to change your direction. It's like a sailboat. A sailboat has a rudder to steer it, but that boat can be sitting still in the water and the rudder doesn't affect it at all if it's not moving forward. The boat has to be proceeding forward before it can be steered. The best way for God to guide you is to be going in a certain direction. And then as you're moving along with your plans, that's when God can steer you. And so Paul made some bold plans.

2. Remain flexible

Make bold plans, but be flexible in your plans and allow God to change your direction and to steer you. The text shows you how flexible Paul was. Look at verse. He uses the word. In verse six he says, "I'll stay with you a while." He's flexible...he says "I hope to spend..." and "If the Lord permits..." You need to

make plans, but all of your plans need to be under the umbrella of those four words: If the Lord permits. I heard somebody say one time that there's a beatitude that you don't read in the Bible that goes like this: blessed are the flexible for they shall not be bent out of shape!

Whenever you do mission work, you've got to remain flexible. You can't be hardened in your expectations or hardened in your attitudes. Now I'll admit I can make my wife madder than a hornet by acting a certain way. Here's what I can do to make her mad. Let's say we're going out to eat somewhere and we've already decided where we're going to go eat. Let's say we're going to Liangs, and we get in the car and I say, "How about somewhere else? Do you really want to go to Liangs?" I try not to do it, but you know what I am doing? I'm just trying to be flexible. Well, I've learned that when it comes to our marriage and where we eat, I don't need to be flexible. We need to make plans and decide this is it. We're going to go there to eat, come hell or high water.

But when it comes to serving the Lord, you can start off in a direction, but remain flexible. Paul says, "This is my plan, but God can redirect me."

3. Be persistent

When facing opposition, be persistent. Verse 9 says, "I'm going to stay in Ephesus for a while because a great door for effective work has opened to me." And he's excited about it. Then he mentions there are many who oppose him. Wait a minute. Wouldn't you expect Paul to say, "I've got a lot of opposition. So I'm getting out of here in a hurry"? Wouldn't you expect him to say, "I'm leaving as soon as I can, because there are many who oppose me"? But that's not what he says. He says there's a great door of opportunity. It is a truth from the word of God that when you are faithfully and effectively serving God, there will always, always be opposition.

Dr. G Campbell Morgan was a prince of preachers and has written some wonderful commentaries. He was speaking to a group of pastors in London about opposition and you know what he said? He said, "If you're serving the Lord and there is no opposition, you're serving in the wrong place." If you're going in the same direction as the devil, you won't meet any opposition. It's when you go in the wrong direction that you come up against the devil. That's when you face opposition. It's like rubbing the cat the wrong way. But I say let the cat turn around if it's headed toward hell! Whenever you serve the Lord, like Paul did, there's going to be opposition. Billy Graham once wrote these words: "The door of opportunity always swings on the hinges of opposition." Paul says, "I'm facing opposition, but I'm hanging in there. I'm going to stay right here in Ephesus, because there's a great opportunity as well as great opposition." And you must have that kind of positive attitude when you face opposition.

I heard about a platoon of soldiers in the middle of a battle that was surrounded by the enemy. The Sergeant looked at all of his soldiers and said, "We're surrounded.

So let's don't let one of the enemy escape.” We’re going to be positive. Even though we face opposition, we're going to take charge. You know, through the years I have really enjoyed reading biographies of great men. And I try to find some things in the character of these men to learn from. And I'll never forget as a schoolboy reading the biography of John Paul Jones, who is the first Naval hero in the history of America. And John Paul Jones was in a battle with another British Man of War during the Revolutionary War. In battle back then, one ship would pull up next to another ship firing cannons at each other point blank. John Paul Jones’ ship was falling apart, it was sinking and on fire. And the British general sent a message over to John Paul Jones that said, “Are you ready to surrender?” He sent a message back to the British general that said, “Sir, I have not yet begun to fight.” And he ended up winning the battle. That's what I call persistence in the face of opposition. Anytime you face opposition serving the Lord, just remember that. You have to be persistent and be faithful. And that's what the apostle Paul was. And we can learn something from that.

4. Be helpful to your friends

You're going to make a lot of friends along the way as you serve the Lord. And you'll make a lot of enemies as well. And you need to always be helpful to your friends. Now, beginning in verse 10, all the way through verse 19, Paul mentions by name seven different individuals who are important to him. And he has a special word about each one of them. I want to look at two of them.

First of all, he says something about Timothy, who was coming to be with them there in Corinth. He says, “I want you to treat him so kindly. And I want you to receive him with such a welcome that he doesn't have to be afraid.” What do we know about young Timothy? Well, we know from reading 1 and 2 Timothy, the letters Paul wrote to Timothy, that he was a young man who was prone to fear and worry. That's why Paul had to write him a letter that says, “Timothy, don't be afraid. God is not giving you the spirit of fear, but of power and love and a sound mind.” We know that that Timothy was prone toward anxiety and that he even had stomach problems. That's why Paul had to say to drink a little wine for his stomach’s sake. Here was Timothy, a young man trying to serve the Lord, but yet he was prone to anxiety and fear.

And Paul says to the church at Corinth to receive him the same way they would receive Paul. There's a wonderful ministry called the ministry of recommendation. Do you know somebody that's a brother or sister in Christ that maybe you could recommend to help somebody? As a pastor, I do that all the time. Here's somebody that's got a problem or an opportunity. And here's somebody else that needs to link up with that person. And I love getting the two of them together. You know, one of the greatest success stories that we're going to see in the City of Tyler is Breckenridge Village out near the airport. Jean Breckenridge and our church have

had a vision for years of using her property as a home to care for adult mentally retarded people.

One of the greatest fears that parents of mentally retarded people have is that the parents are going to die and there's going to be nobody to take care of their retarded children. And so Jean had this vision and she came to the church and asked if we could support and build this home. And our church leaders prayed about it but didn't think that was the kind of ministry that we could take on. I went to the Smith County Baptist Association and asked if our association could take it on. And it didn't seem to work out. But then I heard about the South Texas children's home down in San Antonio. And I talked to some of the leadership down there and they said, "We've been thinking about establishing a home like that." And they even had some property over in Van that they were going to use. And so the simple thing that I did was say there's this lady in our church and she's got some property in Tyler that she would really like to use for that. And it is a joy to my heart to see that now Jean Breckenridge and South Texas children's home got together. And if you saw the news just a few weeks ago, there was groundbreaking at the Breckenridge Village, and it is a work that will continue for many years. There's going to be a beautiful facility out there where about a hundred wonderful people will live and work and be productive members of our society. And all I did was just recommend some people to get together.

That's what the apostle Paul was doing. He said, "Timothy, get together and take care of one another." Throughout life, look for opportunities to help your friends. Paul did.

II. PAUL'S COMMANDS

In verse 13, like a machine gun, Paul gives these four staccato commands. Up to this point, everything has been a little bit negative. He's been saying, "This is what you're doing wrong. This is what I don't like about the church." And now he's like a general giving marching orders for them going into battle as he finishes this letter. Here are his orders:

1. Be alert for the enemy

Verse 13 says to be on your guard. Now that word means "to be vigilant." First Peter chapter four, verse eight has Peter saying, "Be alert, be sober for our enemy. The devil is roaming about like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour over." In Mark chapter 14 Jesus is in the Garden of Gethsemane and he says to the disciples, "Stay alert. Keep watch that you will not enter into temptation." One reason Christians fall into temptation and fall into sin because they lower their guard. They quit being on guard. They quit being on alert status. And as a Christian, we ought to be ready to resist temptation. But when you get lazy and you're not ready to resist the devil, that's when you fall. So he says, stay alert.

2. Be firm on the word

Verse 13 says to stand firm in the faith. When he uses the word “faith” here, he's not talking about saving faith. He's not talking about belief. He's talking about faith when Jude writes about “earnestly contending for the faith”—a body of doctrine and belief that was “once for all delivered to the saints” and we need to fight for it. Now the Mormons don't like to hear that. They like to say there's some new doctrine and some new truth added to the Bible. But no, the Bible says the faith was once for all delivered to the saints And Paul says to stand firm on it.

Don't let anybody push you off center. You stand on the word. Paul is telling these Christians don't ever deviate from the word of God. Through the years, I appreciate Christian church members even to this day who admonish me and sometimes correct me when I may say something that's not right in line with the word of God. Believe it or not, there are folks that correct me at times. And I appreciate it. If they're following the word of God and if I have deviated and I've not stood on the word for an hour, I want to be corrected. I do not want to deviate from the word.

When I was 18 years old, I was the interim pastor of a little church in South Alabama. And looking back on that, I cannot believe that I was because I preached some of the sorriest sermons! You just can't imagine how bad they were. I can't imagine how bad they were. When I had graduated from high school, this little church kept me on as interim pastor. Even when I was going to Samford university as a freshman, I would drive back and forth for several months to preach on weekends at this church. And then drive back to Birmingham. I can't come up with enough things to preach!

Grady Nutt spoke at our chapel at the university one time and he was good and funny. I remember he spoke on the story of Pinocchio about how all Pinocchio ever wanted to be was a real person. And you go through a lot of trials, but it's possible like Pinocchio to become a real person through Jesus. When I heard that, I thought, “That's a great message.” So the next Sunday, I went down to those farmers in South Alabama. And guess what I preached on?

I didn't even open the Bible and didn't even have a text. I just told the story of Pinocchio, like Grady had. And I was amazed when those people didn't like it. They sat there looking at me like a calf and a new gate. I'll never forget at the end of the service what Ms. Ethel Wiggins said. She was a saint of God who carried a huge King James Bible with her all the time. She walked with God. She never said anything publicly about it, but she backed me into a corner after everyone left. She was about 10 inches shorter than I was. And she looked up in my face and she said, “Son, preach the Bible. Just preach the Bible.”

And you know what? I thank God for Ms. Wiggins who corrected me. You know why? I wasn't standing on the word. I was preaching some story and then trying to make an application. But since that time I've tried to stand on the word. And that's what Paul says. Stand firm on the faith.

3. Be strong against adversity

Verse 13 says to be men of courage, be strong. And why does he say that? There's a battle going on. I want to remind you that the Christian life is not a playground. It's a battleground, and you can't have victory in Jesus unless there's a battle going on. And because there is a battle, you need to be courageous and strong.

Compare what he says here in chapter 16 with what he wrote in chapter three. Earlier he wrote, "I cannot write to you as spiritual men, but as babies. You folks are so spiritually immature. I can't even write to you as spiritual adults." And so what he's saying to this church is to be mature. He doesn't want to have to treat them like spiritual babies. You know, the sad fact is we have a lot of babies who are attending church and they're adults. We have some 200-pound babies. What I mean by that is people who've been Christians for 10, 20, 30 years but couldn't find Ecclesiastes in the Bible. They don't know if it's the Old Testament or New Testament. You tell them to open their Bible to the book of Hezekiah, which isn't even a Bible book, and they're going to start looking for it. They don't have any biblical knowledge. They've not grown up in the faith.

There's no shortcut to spiritual maturity. There's not a pill you can take. There's not a weekend course. The only thing that brings about maturity is daily, daily, daily, getting in the word...and praying, spending time alone with God. And Paul says, "You're going to have to be mature. You're going to have to be strong because there's a battle going on."

4. Be loving in everything

Verse 14 says to do everything in love. Paul repeats the importance of love. You remember when he talked about spiritual gifts? He says, "If I can preach the stars down, if I can pray in tongues of men and angels, if I give everything I have to the poor, if I give my body to be killed as a martyr, if I do everything and have faith to move mountains...but I don't have love...I'm nothing. I'm a sounding brass. Tinkling cymbal."

You say, "Well, that's easy for Paul to say because it seems to me like Paul was loved by everybody. And so he loved everybody." No. Just go back and see how the church at Corinth treated Paul. They were the ones saying he wasn't really an apostle. They pointed to Peter and said he was a real apostle, but not Paul. They split into groups and some people did not like Paul. Everywhere Paul went, there was a group of Jews who were trying to put him to death. In Jerusalem, there was a group of Jews who were so intent upon Paul's death that they said, "We're not going to eat another bite of food. We're not going to drink another drop of liquid until we kill Paul." Paul suffered and faced persecution. He faced abuse, but you know what Paul said? He said to do everything you do in love. Don't retaliate. Don't seek revenge. Just love. So we learned something not only from Paul's

character, but we also can learn by obeying the command that Paul has given under the direction of the Holy Spirit.

OUTLINE

INTRODUCTION

I. PAUL'S CHARACTER

- 1. Make bold plans**
- 2. Remain flexible**
- 3. Be persistent**
- 4. Be helpful to your friends**

II. PAUL'S COMMANDS

- 1. Be alert for the enemy**
- 2. Be firm on the word**
- 3. Be strong against adversity**
- 4. Be loving in everything**

INTRODUCTION

Perhaps at one time or another you've attended or been a part of a dead church. One way you can tell which are the dead churches, there are a lot of people that go to sleep. I heard about a pastor who got tired of one old fellow in the church going to sleep every Sunday. As soon as the pastor got up to preach, this old boy just laid his head over on the side and went sound asleep. Sometimes even snored. Well, one Sunday, the preacher decided he'd really get back at him. And he just stopped in the middle of his sermon and said quietly, "Everyone who wants to go to heaven when they die, please stand to your feet." Everybody got to their feet except that old boy just sitting back there sound asleep. Then the preacher said to be seated. And then he said, "Everybody in this room that wants to go to hell, stand up." At that moment that man woke up and jumped to his feet. Of course, he's the only one standing up and everybody's just laughing. The old boy looks around and says, "Preacher, I don't know what we're voting on, but you and me are the only ones approving it."

Let me tell you the difference between live churches and dead churches. Live churches have parking problems. Dead churches don't grow so fast. In live churches, you don't know everybody's name and you never will. In dead churches everybody has known everybody for years and wishes they didn't.. Live churches are constantly changing. Dead churches never do. Live churches have lots of noisy kids running around. Dead churches are quiet as a cemetery. Live churches' expenses always exceed their income. They're always behind. Dead churches take in more money than they'll ever dream of spending. Live churches are constantly improving for the future. Dead churches worship their past. Live churches move out in faith. Dead churches operate totally by human sight. Live churches focus on people. Dead churches focus on programs. Live churches are filled with tithers. Dead churches are filled with tippers. Live churches dream great dreams of God. Dead churches relive past nightmares. Live churches don't have "can't" in their vocabulary. Dead churches say nothing, but "we can't." Live churches evangelize. Dead churches fossilize.

I heard of a pastor who was in a church that was obviously a dead church. And on a Sunday morning, he brought in a casket to the front of that church to conduct the funeral of that church. And then he had everybody at the end of the service stand up and file by that open casket. And as they walked by, they looked in and there was a mirror because dead churches are made up of dead Christians. But live and exciting dynamic churches are made up of dynamic Christians. And here in 1

Corinthians 16, Paul gives some principles for dynamic churches. First Corinthians 16:15-24 says:

¹⁵ You know that the household of Stephanas were the first converts in Achaia, and they have devoted themselves to the service of the Lord's people. I urge you, brothers and sisters,¹⁶ to submit to such people and to everyone who joins in the work and labors at it. ¹⁷ I was glad when Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus arrived, because they have supplied what was lacking from you. ¹⁸ For they refreshed my spirit and yours also. Such men deserve recognition. ¹⁹ The churches in the province of Asia send you greetings. Aquila and Priscilla greet you warmly in the Lord, and so does the church that meets at their house. ²⁰ All the brothers and sisters here send you greetings. Greet one another with a holy kiss. ²¹ I, Paul, write this greeting in my own hand. ²² If anyone does not love the Lord, let that person be cursed! Come, Lord! The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you. ²⁴ My love to all of you in Christ Jesus. Amen.

That phrase “devoted themselves to the service of the saints” literally means they have addicted themselves to the service of the saints. Now we're going to look at five marks of an exciting dynamic church.

I. HEALTHY CONGREGATIONS EXHIBIT AN ATMOSPHERE OF AFFIRMATION FOR FAITHFUL SERVICE

In other words, in that church, there are people who are serving the Lord and they are affirmed. They are recognized. And he points out several things about these individuals that we can apply to our live today. We're not just talking about people from 2,000 years ago; I want to make the application to you.

1. Are you addicted to ministry?

Is it just something that you've just got to do? I heard somebody say, “I don't want to be hooked on anything except phonics.” But I think it's good to be hooked on ministry. And that's what Paul says about these individuals. Have you ever thought about what an addiction is? And of course we usually use the word “addiction” as something very negative. People are often addicted to the wrong things. When you have an addiction, first of all, you have an intense desire. And then secondly, you have a regular habit. But there's something else about addiction that we understand, especially addiction to harmful substances, you develop a tolerance and so you have to do more than you did before. And I think you can say that about ministry.

Do you have an intense desire as a believer to serve the Lord? To minister to other people like these three individuals Paul mentions? Is your ministry a regular habit? Are you doing it all the time? Have you discovered that when you do some kind of ministry, it just makes you want to do more ministry? That's what it means to be addicted to ministry. When Paul writes about these three individuals, he says they addicted themselves. It's in what's called a “middle voice” in the Greek language. It means it's something they did to themselves. Some of you are waiting for me or

Mike or Dennis or somebody to say, “Hey, we need you to do this... We want to ask you to do this... We appoint you to do this...” You will do it if you are asked. But that’s not what these individuals did. They didn't wait until somebody asking them. It says they did it themselves. They devoted themselves to ministry. I told you before, there are some people who are saved and all they do is sit and soak and sour. That's all they do. They never serve. My friend, you are saved to serve.

Have you heard the poem about the fellow that never served? He was just waiting to go to heaven. It reads: “He wasn't much for stirring about. That wasn't his desire. While others worked to build their church, he was just sitting by the fire. Same old story day by day. He never seemed to tire. While others in the church were serving the Lord, he was just sitting by the fire. One day he died and got his due. And some say he went up higher. But if he's doing what he always did, he is still sitting by the fire.”

You are saved to serve. And I want to ask you, are you addicted to some ministry? These men were, and Paul says I want you to affirm the people in your church who are serving the Lord faithfully.

2. Do you refresh hurting saints?

He says when these guys came to him, they refreshed his spirit. Have you discovered that every person has a gasoline gauge on their emotional dashboard? You've got one. And I've got one. There are some people that, when you interact with them, your gas gauge goes over to empty. But there are other people who, when you visit with them and interact with them, you know what happens to your emotional gas gauge? It fills up. Some people refresh you. And some people deplete you and drain you. We know that's true. Now I want to turn it around. Which kind of person are you? I mean, do you have the kind of attitude and personality that when you minister to somebody, you just refresh them? You're like a breath of fresh air.

Or are you the kind of person who is always talking about your own problems? And you're always draining other people?

Paul says these people refresh his spirit in verse 18. That word “refresh” is an interesting word there. That word is found in the Bible in Matthew chapter 12, where Jesus said, “Come unto me all you who are heavy laden and you’ll find rest for your soul.” It’s the same word. Some people are like a breath of fresh air, and others are like the stench of a sewage plant. Now, which one are you? Paul says when there are people in your church who are serving the Lord and ministering, affirm them. Encourage them.

II. DYNAMIC CHURCHES HAVE AN ATMOSPHERE OF ACCEPTANCE OF OTHER BELIEVERS

Paul writes to the church at Corinth and he says, "All of these other churches in Asia are sending you greetings." They're acknowledging that you are believers. Did you hear about the church that put a big sign on the side of their building that said, "Jesus only"? But they didn't really mean that. They were sort of exclusive and they never really accepted people into their fellowship. So everything in that church just began deteriorating. And old vine grew up on the side of the building and it covered up the "J E S" until sign read more appropriately, "Us Only." Some churches are like that. They don't want anybody else. They think they're big enough. They say, "We don't want any new members. We don't want any new believers in this church. We just like our little fellowship, just like we got it. Us only."

The mark of healthy, exciting churches is that they're always accepting other believers. They're accepting and acknowledging that other people can love the Lord and know the Lord, even if they don't go to your church.

1. Do you acknowledge believers in other churches?

In other words, do you believe that there are some Methodists who are saved, as well as some Presbyterians and some Catholics? I believe there are some Catholics that are saved. I really do. I believe that there are some Assembly of God Christians that are saved. Some Pentecostal Christians that are saved. Sometimes Baptists just think if you're not a Baptist, you're not saved.

Maybe you heard the story about the Baptist preacher at a revival. He was preaching about how good Baptists are and said, "Everybody in this room who is a Baptist and proud of it stand up and say, amen." And everybody jumped to their feet. Then he said, "Anyone who is not a Baptist, say amen," kind of daring them to do it. A little boy on the back row stood up and said, "I'm a Methodist." And the preacher thought he'd get him good. He said, "Why are you a Methodist?" The little boy said, "I'm a Methodist because my mommy and daddy are Methodists." The preacher said, "Son, if your mommy and daddy were idiots, what would you be?" He said, "I guess I'd be a Baptist."

I guarantee you I know some Baptists who think that way. They think if you're not Baptist, you're not going to heaven. Well, it seems to me that when you read the New Testament, Paul didn't say the Baptist churches in Asia send greetings. He didn't say the Methodist churches in Asia send you greetings. You know what he said? He said the churches...the believers...over there in Asia, just like they were believers in Corinth. And one of the signs of a healthy, dynamic church is that you recognize and acknowledge Christians and other churches. And I want to say it loud and I want to say it clear: Green Acres Baptist Church is not in competition with any other church.

I was visiting a family not long ago that have moved into the area. They visited our church and visited some other churches. And they decided they were going to join

another church. They acted like they was just really going to break my heart. And I said, “No, listen, we're not in competition. If you're happier in that other church, you go to that other church. The main thing is that you and your family are in church. And if you choose not to go to our church, by all means you go to another church because we're cooperating together. We're not competing against each other.” And anytime a church starts having a competitive spirit toward other churches, God will take his hand of blessing off that church. And so do you acknowledge believers and other churches?

2. Do you use your home for Jesus?

Here's the second personal question that goes along with this text. Look at what the Bible says in verse 19. It says, “Aquila and Priscilla greet you warmly in the Lord and so does the church that meets in their house.” Did you know that for the first 300 years of Christianity, there were no church buildings? Where did they meet? They met in homes and they met outdoors. When they gathered for a large crowd, they met outdoors. On the Day of Pentecost, when 3000 were saved, they were out in the temple. The earliest congregations were in homes. And we ought to learn something about that. I'm not saying let's tear down these buildings and have churches in homes. I'm not saying that, but I'm saying that you and I can use our home for Jesus to reach people.

Have you discovered the wonderful ministry of Christian hospitality, where you open your home for Jesus? God blesses that, just like he blessed Aquila and Priscilla. Do you know where the largest local church in the world is right now? In fact, the largest local church in the history of Christianity is located Seoul, Korea. It grew from 123 believers to over 500,000. You know how it's growing? They used their homes for Jesus. They used their homes aggressively for Jesus. All throughout the week, believers in and around Seoul, Korea, open up their homes to their neighbors and to those who don't know Jesus Christ. And they invite them into their home. They feed them a meal. They talk about Jesus. They talk about what's going on in their church. And they say, “Wouldn't you like to go to church with me sometime?” I've been told that believers feel terrible if they arrive for worship and they don't have a unbeliever with them. It's unheard of. And they use their homes for that. That's the only way a church can grow to be that large. I think they have about 15 weekend worship services and a huge building. Ministry can't take place in a huge crowd like that. It takes place in the homes. Are you using your home for Jesus? When was the last time you invited your neighbors or your business associates into your home with the intent of trying to lead them to a relationship with Jesus Christ? You say, “Pastor, I don't really know how to witness. I don't know the four laws or six steps, the nine keys, or any of those things.” I'm not talking about that. I'm just talking about building bridges of relationships and then bringing them to the body of Christ. You know what the

body of Christ is? It's church. Bring them in here. This great singing and this fair preaching...who knows? God can save them out of a relationship like that.

Who gets the credit? Not the music, not the preacher, but the person that brought them to the body of Christ. Are you using your home for Jesus?

III. AN EXCITING CHURCH SHOWS AFFECTION TOWARD EACH OTHER

Paul says in verse 20 to greet one another with a holy kiss. Now the emphasis is not on kissing. I remember when I was a youth minister the teenagers used to talk to me about dating. They wanted to know was it okay to kiss. They knew the things they weren't supposed to do, or at least they thought they knew. But they wanted to know if it's okay for two Christians to kiss at the end of a date. And my answer was always this, "There's a kiss. And then there's a kiss."

Well, the emphasis in this text is not on kiss. The emphasis is on "holy." It means chaste. It means pure. There's nothing romantic involved in this kiss. There's nothing sexual implied in this kiss. What it's talking about is to show affection toward other believers. And here are the two personal questions I want to ask you about affection.

1. Do you greet others physically?

I know you may greet them verbally, but I think that there is something very powerful about touch. You know, in different cultures, they still kiss as a greeting. In fact, that's why I said a holy kiss because this was sort of a Middle Eastern culture, and they still do that today. Some of you remember me reporting when we came back from the Ukraine how they try to kiss you. The men tried to kiss you. I'll never forget the first time one of those old men reached up and kissed me on the cheek. The first thing I thought was, "I hate the feel of those whiskers. My poor wife has had to feel that all these years? Yuck!" But there was one old fellow that we call the general. He was retired from the Russian army. He tried to hug and kiss you right on the mouth.

I didn't really like it too much, but that's cultural. In America, we hug or something like that to greet each other. I really think that the idea here means is that when you go to church, you ought to be touched. You ought to shake some hands. You ought to hug. You ought to be greeted physically. Do you do that? Or are you uncomfortable when we hold hands and sing. There is something in a high-tech world that demands that we be a high-touch church. That we show affection to one another. Did you know that hurting people need to be hugged? Hurting people need to sense a feeling of acceptance and affection.

I love the story that RG Lee tells about the time he was preaching in the mountains of West Virginia. And he said it was such backwoods community and he'd never seen people who live like that real hillbillies. He went into one home to have

dinner. And it was a home was so backwards that they kept a pet pig in the house! And he said he was sitting down to eat and that pig just kept rubbing against his leg and trying to climb up in his lap. And Dr. Lee kept pushing it down. And finally he said to the father, "That's sure an affectionate pig you've got there." And the father said, "Affectionate? You're eating out of his cup."

Well, I think we ought to be like that old pig. I really do. Especially when new people come into our church, they ought to feel welcomed. Over six years ago now this church was talking to us about coming to be pastor here. And Cindy and I snuck over to a service. The committee knew we were coming. We snuck over on a Sunday evening to a Sunday night worship service and we sat about halfway back. And we sat there the whole service and we don't recall one person reaching out and touching us or greeting us and saying anything to us. We just came in, stood around, and walked out. I know that doesn't happen often. It really doesn't. But it grieves me to think that anybody could ever come into a worship service here and not be personally greeted by one of our members.

You say, "That's your job, pastor. You stand at the door and shake their hand." Well, they may not come out that door. You say it's the usher's job. Or the deacons. Or the staff. No, every member ought to make yourself an ambassador for Christ to everybody that comes in here Sunday after Sunday. You ought to greet them, physically shake their hand, hug their neck, and say, "We're glad you're a part of our worship today." Are you doing that? Are you greeting people physically?

2. Do you write notes to each other?

Here's the second personal question about affection. And this is very interesting because maybe you haven't thought of showing affection this way, but Paul talks about it in verse 21. Paul says he writes this greeting in his own hand. And what does that mean? It means that this entire epistle has been dictated to this point. Paul's been talking, and somebody has been writing it down. But at this point, Paul takes the quill in his hand and begins to write on the papyrus. And he says, "I am Paul and I am writing this greeting with my own hand." He says, "I'm lending authenticity to this letter. I'm verifying I'm the author." But you know what he's also saying? He's making it personal. He's personally greeting them with a handwritten note. And we believe that from that point in verse 21, the next two or three verses Paul wrote it in his own handwriting.

Did you know that you can show affection to people just by writing encouraging notes to them? You can show affection and appreciation and encouragement to other people by writing notes and sending them to people. Tell them you love them. Tell them you're praying for him. Now, when I said something about us not being greeted on that Sunday night, you may think our church is cold. It is not whatsoever. In fact, let me tell you an amazing miracle. I've been here over six

years, and I can honestly say that not a single week has gone by in the six years I've been here that I have not received at least one encouraging note from somebody in this church. And you say, is it the same person doing it every week? Oh, it's not!

I don't really know of a pastor anywhere else where somebody has written a note of encouragement to the pastor every week. These notes just say: I'm praying for you. I appreciate you. I love you. I can't tell you how much that means to me. It just blesses my heart.

It takes about 20 positive, encouraging notes to cancel out one ugly, dirty note. Did you know that the ratio is 20 to one? And there are a lot of other people who need your encouragement, who are struggling, who are having a hard time. And maybe for you, walking over and hugging somebody is just not your thing. Why don't you sit down and affirm them and show them affection by writing? Paul did that and you can do it too.

IV. DYNAMIC CHURCHES ARE EXCITED ABOUT CHRIST'S RETURN

In verse 22 Paul uses the term, "Maranatha," which means "our Lord comes." Every great church that I know of that God is blessing is one that talks a lot about the second coming of Jesus Christ. They sing songs about Jesus coming again. They hear teaching and messages about the return of the Lord Jesus Christ. Whereas in churches that are dead and decaying and dying, there's not much talk about the second coming of Jesus Christ. In the Early Church, when they met together and they greeted one another, they didn't say, "good morning" or "Shalom." You know what they said? They said, "Maranatha the Lord is coming!" When they dismissed and they left each other's presence they said, "Maranatha the Lord is coming!" We have extra-biblical writings that verify what happened when these Christians were being taken to the Roman prisons to be executed. They were taken into the Coliseum to be fed to the lions or thrown into Nero's prisons. The Christians would always send their love with those people who were dying and say, "Maranatha." In other words, you may be dying, but Jesus is coming back and he's going to win the victory.

1. Do you love Jesus?

Look what Paul says in verse 22. "If anyone does not love the Lord, a curse be on him." Did you know that is what the Jews tried to get Christians to do? In fact, when you read one of Paul's testimonies in Acts chapter 26, verse 11, you know what he says? He said, "I drug Christians out of their home and forced them to blaspheme." And many scholars think that the way the Jewish leaders tried to get Christians to do so was by making them say these words Paul uses: "anathema" which means accursed. They wanted them to say Jesus is cursed, but they would say Jesus is Lord! When the Romans would tie them to the stakes to be burned, they would command them to say these words. But they would say Jesus is Lord

instead! Nero would tie the Christians to the trees in his garden, cover them pitch and tar, and set fire to them to eliminate his garden. As he would ride his horses through his gardens at night. And the last words these Christians would say is Jesus is Lord. would be Sherri OSS.

I want tell you that if anybody doesn't love Jesus, they're the ones that are going to be cursed. They're the ones who are going to be punished because they just simply don't love Jesus. You know what I've discovered through the years? I've discovered that when somebody says about a believer that they really love Jesus, that's key. Some say about Christians, "You know, they go to church a lot. They sing pretty songs. They can really preach a sermon. They give a lot of money to the church. They really feed the hungry and visit the sick." But when you say someone really loves Jesus, that says it all. Has anybody ever said that about you? Paul says, if you don't love Jesus, you'll be cursed.

2. Do you long for Jesus to return?

Do you long for him to come back? Can you say every morning, every noon, every evening, "Maranatha! Even so, Lord Jesus, come on back"? In 2 Timothy four verse eight are the last words of Paul. This is right after he had said, "...the time of my departure is at hand. I'm ready to be offered up." He writes about "all who have longed for his appearing." Now it's one thing for me to ask you if you love Jesus. Oh yeah. I love Jesus. But do you really want him to return? I'm not talking about in a year. I'm not talking about in 10 years. I'm not talking about it the new millennium. Do you really want Jesus to come back tonight? I mean, do you really long for him to come back tonight? Because if you don't, you need to examine your heart and see if there's something that's wrong there.

The King James version says all those who "love his appearing." Some people love Jesus, but they don't love his appearing.

When I was about six years old, only a first grader, I had a friend and we snuck over to one of our other friends in the neighborhood. And we went into his garage that was open, and nobody was at home. And we just decided he had more and better toys than we did. So we decided we'd do something about it. And so we just began to steal everything in that garage. I mean, we made six or seven trips into that garage, carting these toys and things out across two or three lots in that little subdivision to this lot with a bunch of tall grass. Well, we decided not to stop with the toys. We started hauling off everything in that garage. And on about the 10th or 11th trip, this lady and her son drives up in the driveway, honking their horn and she jumps out and grabs us. And you know what she does? She takes us home and tells our mothers what we have done!

My mother would discipline us at times. And she did a pretty good job, but it was nothing like the way my dad disciplined. And I knew it was always a bad, bad, bad time when she would call him just say for him to come home. Well, that was one

of those occasions. She was so mad at me. She put me in my room and she said, "I'm going to call your father, and he's going to come home and you're going to get it." And so she called my dad and he had to come home from work. And I want to tell you that the 10 or 15 minutes I waited for him to come home was a pretty awful time of waiting. I'll never forget when he pulled up there in his pickup truck. I can honestly tell you that I loved my dad, but I didn't love his appearing.

There may be some of you that love Jesus, but you don't love his appearing for the same reason. Maybe there's some unconfessed sin in your life and you don't want Jesus to come back tonight. There are some habits, some things in your life that you still don't have victory over. You don't want him to come back tonight. Maybe you don't want him to come back tonight because there's some unfinished business. Maybe there's somebody that you've been meaning to witness to. And you know that if Jesus comes back tonight, your window of opportunity to witness that person is going to be gone. So you say, "Lord, I'm sorry. I've been procrastinating, but I don't want you to come back tonight." There may be a multitude of reasons why you don't want him to come back. But if you can't welcome him back tonight, something's wrong. Ask, "What area of my life do I need to fix?" Do you love Jesus and long for his return?

V. DYNAMIC CHURCHES HAVE AN ATMOSPHERE OF GRACE

Sometimes when we come to the end of a letter, we skip over the end. But Paul says, "...the grace of the Lord Jesus be with you." The opposite of grace is an arrogant attitude that says, "I deserve everything I've got." And we even think God is not giving us enough and life is not fair. That's the opposite of grace. You know what grace is? Grace is something that you desperately need, but you don't deserve. And in our case, as Christians, you know what it is? It's salvation. It's forgiveness. It's acceptance into the family of God because none of us deserve it. But that's what grace is.

1. Do you accept grace humbly?

Do you have an attitude of humility and say, "God, I'm just so grateful for everything that you've given to me"? Are you one of those people who is always looking around and wishing it were a lot better? Do you feel God hasn't delivered on everything yet? I heard about a lady who was praying for God to do something in her life. And he just wouldn't do it. And it seemed like he was taking so long to do it. And she said, "Lord, I know you're never late, but you have missed a lot of good opportunities to be early." Do you have an attitude of complaining against God?

Or do you have a humble attitude that says, "Lord, you've just blessed me in so many ways. I can't believe it"? And when you look at people less fortunate than you do you say, "There but for the grace of God go I?" You heard about Timothy McVeigh being found guilty. What's your attitude toward him? How can he do

something like that? Is that your attitude? Or do you think if it wasn't for the grace of God, you'd do something a whole lot worse than that?

When you hear about these rapists and serial killers, do you think, "If it wasn't for God's grace and

forgiveness, that would be me"? Is that the attitude that you have about grace? Do you humbly accept God's grace?

2. Do you show love to others?

Look at the way Paul finishes verse 24. If you don't know the history of this letter, you'll miss the importance of that little statement Paul makes about loving "all" the believers. Paul had tons of trouble with the church. They didn't like him. Some said we follow Apollos, not you, Paul. They accused him of not even being an apostle. Second Corinthians 10 shows their evaluation of Paul when he was in Corinth. They said he was unimpressive. His speaking amounts to nothing. He says, "I've heard what you've said about me. You don't like me. There are a lot of you that don't care for me." And he named names. He made people mad. He was blunt in pointing out sin. But then at the end of this letter in 1 Corinthians he says he loves them all.

Have you discovered how easy it is to love those people that love you? Have you discovered how easy it is to love those people that affirm you and encourage you and support you? Have you found how easy it is to love those people who put your emotional gas tank to full all the time? Sure. Folks, that's easy. But learn to love those people that drain you, who mistreat you, who malign you, and who hurt you. The one thing they need most from you is your love.

Paul said, "...my love to all of you in Christ Jesus." The key is in those last three words. You cannot love people who are unlovely unless you love them "in Christ Jesus."

CONCLUSION

Look at those marks of a dynamic church. Could you say those exist in our church? That we affirm people who serve the Lord, who are addicted to ministry, that we're accepting of other believers, that we have affection toward one another, that we're anticipating the return of Jesus, that we have an awareness of grace?

I say "yes" to every one of those, praise God. But I also want to say there's a lot of room for improvement. The way our church becomes stronger and the way our church becomes more dynamic is when each one of us commits ourselves to let these character qualities be improved in our personal lives. You know, my heart's prayer and desire for this church is that when people come to our church, they'll think about Jesus.

Did you know when da Vinci was commissioned to paint The Last Supper, the Duke of Milan was the one who ordered the painting? Da Vinci painstakingly

painted all the faces of the disciples and Jesus. But then he painted a beautiful, ornate golden chalice that Jesus was passing to the other disciples. And when finally the piece of art was done, he took it to the Duke. He remarked, "Wonderful. It is beautiful. The chalice is so beautiful I can't take my eyes off it." At that, Leonardo da Vinci began to weep. And he said, "I'm not finished." And he took the painting back and painted over the beautiful golden chalice and made it a very ordinary and insignificant part of the picture. Do you know why? He didn't want anything to take away from Jesus. When people come to our church, I don't want them to see a preacher. I don't want to seem programs. I don't want them to see buildings. I don't want them to see a great choir. We want them to see Jesus. If there's anything in my life, or there's anything in your life, that's keeping others from seeing Jesus, we need to get rid of it.

OUTLINE

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I. HEALTHY CONGREGATIONS EXHIBIT AN ATMOSPHERE OF AFFIRMATION FOR FAITHFUL SERVICE

- 1. Are you addicted to ministry?**
- 2. Do you refresh hurting saints?**

II. DYNAMIC CHURCHES HAVE AN ATMOSPHERE OF ACCEPTANCE OF OTHER BELIEVERS

- 1. Do you acknowledge believers in other churches?**
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III. AN EXCITING CHURCH SHOWS AFFECTION TOWARD EACH OTHER

- 1. Do you greet others physically?**
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IV. DYNAMIC CHURCHES ARE EXCITED ABOUT CHRIST'S RETURN

- 1. Do you love Jesus?**
- 2. Do you long for Jesus to return?**

V. DYNAMIC CHURCHES HAVE AN ATMOSPHERE OF GRACE

- 1. Do you accept grace humbly?**
- 2. Do you show love to others?**

CONCLUSION