

## “Parting Thoughts” 1 Corinthians 16:13-24

### Introduction

- For those of you who like top ten lists. Ten Fairy Tales that never happened and probably never will.
  10. Rumpelstiltskin vs. The Predator
  9. The Seven Ugly Stepsisters And Their Other Sister Who Looked Reasonably Cute In The Right Lighting
  8. The Enchanted 2-Bedroom, 1.5-Bath Craftsman Bungalow
  7. The Emperor’s Clothes
  6. Aladdin and the Compact Fluorescent Lamp
  5. The Tale Of Ned Van Winkle, Who Only Overslept By Half An Hour, But On The Morning Of An Important Job Interview
  4. The Wicked Witch Of The Greater Tri-County Area
  3. The Old Woman's Eviction From The Shoe
  2. Sleeping Nice-Personality<sup>1</sup>
  1. And the number one fairy tale that never happened and probably never will: The Church That Has it All Together.
- More than any other I wish that last one was true. But it’s not. It never will be. Christ’s bride will always have imperfections and flaws. The reason we have spent so much time in Corinthians is because the church is so very precious and by the grace of God we want to minimize as many of the imperfections and flaws as we can. I said it at the beginning of this series and it’s worth saying again now at the end.

### Proposition

- **Let’s do it right, this thing called church**
- The church in Corinth is a wonderful picture for us of what not to be as a church: spiritually immature Christians forming partisan groups, a dissatisfaction with church leadership, abuses of the Lord's Table, at least one notorious case of sexual immorality, public litigation among members, uncertainties about the place of marriage, quibbling over food rituals, infatuation with the more spectacular of the charismatic gifts without any profound commitment to love one another, bad theology—especially as it relates to the resurrection.<sup>2</sup> These are lessons from a failed church. Now at the end of Paul’s letter the question is what have we learned? How have we changed?

### Transition

I’ve got another list of ten for you. This morning as we close out our study of 1 Corinthians we’re going to look at...

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<sup>1</sup> 20 Lame Fairy Tales, by Lydon, Toon, Norman, & Rutledge, [www.woot.com](http://www.woot.com), The Blog, Monday April 7, 2008

<sup>2</sup> Carson, Moo, and Morris.

## Organizational Sentence

- **Ten parting thoughts from this study of a failed church**
- Paul's closing words here aren't necessarily connected to all the failings he's just addressed in his letter. But they aren't completely random either. These ten parting thoughts are like pearls. Strung together they make a fitting finale to the ensemble.

## Transition

Look at 1 Corinthians 16:13. There are five commands in [verses 13-14](#); the first five parting thoughts.

## Main Points

- Look what Paul says. Thinking back on all that he's just written he says, *be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be men of courage; be strong. Do everything in love.* [The Message](#) paraphrases these two verses like this. *Keep your eyes open, hold tight to your convictions, give it all you've got, be resolute, and love without stopping.*
- **First** of all Paul says **be on guard**. Watch. Keep awake. Like a baseball player, stay on the balls of your feet and be continually ready. And the natural question is for what? Answer. For the zillion things that can blindsides the comatose, sleepy, non-watching Christian. Paul says in 1 Peter 5:8 and 1 Thessalonians 5:6 say that those who fail to stay vigilant are prone to lapses of self-control. *So then*, he says in 1 Thessalonians, *let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be alert and self-controlled.* There is this connection between giving in to temptation, a lack of self-control and failing to keep watch. Without some guardedness you will end up doing that which you don't want to do. Stay vigilant. Often times an attitude of watchfulness, of staying on guard, happens best through prayer. Jesus warns in Matthew 26:41 *"Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak."* Take note of how fervent or how tepid your prayer life is right now. Watchfulness and prayer go hand in hand.
- Paul also says, as his **second parting thought**, to **stand firm in the faith**. I want you to imagine that the Christian life like standing in something. Depending on the thickness of what you're standing in makes you more or less moveable. When push comes to shove, standing in Jell-O doesn't really compare to standing in wet concrete. A lot of people are standing firm in a lot of different things but those things don't make them immovable. In times of crisis it's really easy to see what a person is standing in. And most of the time, what they're standing in stinks. Those who are generally unmoved by the circumstances of life have their feet fixed firmly *in the faith*. Their faith is in Christ. What are you standing firm in? What's holding you up? There is a reason Paul says way back in 1 Corinthians 1:8 says that *Christ will keep you strong to the end.*
- The **third parting thought**? **Be men of courage**. Don't be chickenhearted. Living the Christian life takes incredible courage. One of the scariest things about the Christian life is being obedient. Sometimes God's commands just don't make sense. Obedience, taking God at his word, takes incredible courage. Paul's parting thought here is *be men of courage*. Obviously, he's not excluding women when he says this. What he's trying to say is "show mature courage." You can't but help think of God's words to young Joshua in Joshua 1:6-9. Moses has died. The people are still on the wrong side of the Jordan. Jericho and other battles await. And God says in Joshua 1:6 *be strong and courageous.* And then he says it

again in [verse 7](#). *Be strong and very courageous*. He reminds Joshua to obey. *Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go*. And then for a third time in [verse 9](#). *Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous*. Paul says *be men of courage*. Be a courageous church. Live courageously. Throughout scripture, and this was true for Joshua, it was true for the Corinthians, and it's true for us now. The reason we can be courageous is because God promises his presence at all times and in every way. Psalm 46:1. *God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. 2 Therefore we will not fear*.

- Which leads to the [fourth parting thought](#). **Be strong**. The image is not of muscular strength per se but of total physical vigor.<sup>3</sup> No flabby out of shape Christians. Instead, *be strong*. Show some mettle. Although a different word is used, Paul's thought here is reminiscent of his closing words in Ephesians 6:10. *Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power*. So the question remains what is Christian strength? Christian strength is dependence upon the Holy Spirit for everything. *'Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,' says the LORD Almighty*.<sup>4</sup> What is your strength in? What is it going to take for you to give up trying to live life from your own strength and instead give it over to God?
- And then Paul puts it all together with the [fifth parting thought](#). **Do everything in love**. Do all these things, *be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be men of courage; be strong*. Do all those things in love. Paul's already said a ton about love earlier in his letter. *Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. 5 It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. 6 Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. 7 It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres*. This is a great reminder that love is to govern everything we do as Christians. Christ-like, self-sacrificial love. It is the true distinguishing mark of a Christian. Jesus say sin John 15:35 *By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another*. Not just the people who are easy to love, the people like you, the people who have the same interests as you, the people who see the world like you, not just those who have the same educational background but everyone—no exceptions. Romans 12:10 says *be devoted to one another in brotherly love*.

### Transition

Those five things, *be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be men of courage; be strong. Do everything in love*. It's great advice. A certain wise man once said, "many receive advice, only the wise profit from it."<sup>5</sup> Good advice is one thing. The wisdom to live it, do it, that's another. May God give us the wisdom to apply these truths. Let's string together the second set of five parting thoughts. Look at [verse 15](#) and following. *You know that the household of Stephanas were the first converts in Achaia, and they have devoted themselves to the service of the saints. I urge you, brothers, 16 to submit to such as these and to everyone who joins in the work, and labors at it*.

- The [sixth parting thought](#) is to **submit to those who labor and toil for others**. In these two verses Paul tells us of Stephanas and his household, the firstfruits, the first converts from

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<sup>3</sup> Louw & Nida #1913.

<sup>4</sup> Zechariah 4:6

<sup>5</sup> Publius Syrus.

Achaia or Greece. The description of this family is remarkable. Does this describe your family? *They have devoted themselves to the service of the saints.* The word *devoted* is actually the word *appoint*. They appointed themselves; they took it upon themselves as a family that they were going to serve others. No one told them. They weren't asked. They just did it. They devoted themselves to others. That's remarkable. What's your family devoted to? Weekends? Recreation? Work? Few and rare are the families—entire families—devoted to the service of others. And notice what kind of service. Work, labor, toil to the point of exhaustion.<sup>6</sup> Paul says **submit to these kinds of people** who give of themselves for others. He's uses pretty strong language. *I urge you* submit to these kinds of servant leaders. They're the real champions of the Kingdom. Make their service a joy, not a burden. May God raise up from within this church a new generation of Stephanas-like families.

- Paul himself personally experienced the fruit of Stephanas' ministry. He goes on to say in [verses 17-18](#) 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. Those who devote themselves to the service of others are refreshing; like breaths of fresh air they blow new life into those whose sails are empty. They're like human Mentos—human FreshMakers. Paul says Stephanas, along with Fortunatus and Achaicus brought a little Corinth to him in Ephesus. They refreshed his spirit. They filled up, they supplied what was lacking. Paul says people like this, servant leaders who devote themselves to others, who see needs and meet them, who fill up others, these kinds of Christians deserve recognition, which is the [seventh parting thought](#). **Recognize the servant leaders** among you. Recognition does necessarily mean a lot of hoopla or fanfare. It's a simple acknowledgement of what's been done. If you've been refreshed by the ministry of a Stephanas make sure you acknowledge that service in some way. Write a thank you note. Call them. Do something that acknowledges what they've done.
- Look at the [eighth parting thought](#) from [verses 19-20](#). *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 here send you greetings. Greet one another with a holy kiss.* Ah, the holy kiss. “In the ancient world it was customary to give a kiss as a greeting both at the meeting and at the departure.”<sup>7</sup> Miriam actually found instructions on how to air kiss. I'd thought I'd share them with you. And I quote, “There are times when you're greeting people with whom you are on good enough terms to call for something more than just a handshake or hug, but it's just not appropriate or comfortable to plant a kiss directly on their cheek. In these cases, give them an air kiss, where you brush cheeks and kiss the air near their cheek. Made popular by celebrities, who must often mingle and make nice with people they barely know, it's most common on formal social occasions and among friendly, well-mannered acquaintances.”
- And then the step by step instructions. **Step 1.** *Know when to kiss.* “Consider both the occasion and the nature of your relationship with each person you greet.” **Step 2.** *Observe how other people are greeting each other.* “This will give you the opportunity to gauge the formality of the occasion and confirm your judgment about whether this is an appropriate time to air kiss.” **Step 3.** *Read their body language.* “As you approach, reach out with your

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<sup>6</sup> Reinecker, p. 448.

<sup>7</sup> Reinecker, p. 448.

hand, whether to touch or grasp their upper arm, elbow, or hand(s). If they recoil or tighten up in any way, it might be wise to consider defaulting to just a loose hug.” **Step 4.** *Lean in for an air kiss.* “Aim to bring your lips near their right cheek (unless it’s customary in your culture to start with the left). Remain observant, though, that they’re going for *your* right cheek, because if they go for your left cheek and you go for their right (or vice versa) there may be an awkward halt as you both realize your faces are about to crash together.” **Step 5.** *Kiss the air next to their cheek.* “Purse your lips together and kiss the air just to the side of their face.” The article concludes with this warning. “When in doubt, shake hands.”

- What’s Paul’s point with the holy kiss? **Show genuine affection** for one another. Do whatever’s customary to let your brother or sister in Christ know that you genuinely care for them. Do we need to start air kissing? Probably not. But when we see each other we do need to give some thought as to whether our greetings demonstrate genuine affection for the person we’re talking to. Show genuine affection.

### Transition

Two more to go. Look at [verses 21-22](#) for the [ninth parting thought](#). **Love Christ** Paul says.

- *I, Paul, write this greeting in my own hand. 22 If anyone does not love the Lord--a curse be on him. Come, O Lord!* This is not some voodoo witchdoctor hex kind of thing. Paul’s not pronouncing a curse on those people who don’t have some special quality of love for Christ. He’s stating fact. If you don’t love Christ you are cursed--period. If in your heart of hearts there is no love for this person Christ then reality is you are in a cursed state. If there is no love for Christ the Lord you are cursed. Harsh? Maybe. True? Without a doubt. Should you worry? Only if you know what this Christ has done for you and you’ve rejected his offer. Galatians 3:13 says that Christ became cursed for us so that we might be redeemed. But if you’ve received his offer then Paul’s admonition here is to **love Christ**. Love him more. Love him with everything you’ve got. And part of an expression of love for Christ is a desire to see him return. That’s why he says *Come, O Lord!* You long to see the one you love, right? **Love Christ**.
- **Parting thought number ten.** Look at [verses 23-24](#). **Live in grace.** *The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you. 24 My love to all of you in Christ Jesus. Amen.* It is fitting that Paul ends this letter with grace. He began with grace way back in chapter 1. *To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ--their Lord and ours: 3 Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.* We are a people of grace; saved by grace, daily dwelling in the pool of God’s grace. The moment we step out of that pool of grace we shrivel up like a raisin in the sun. Grace encompasses and summarizes everything we are as Christians. This reminder of grace is necessary because all the forces of this world will try to convince you otherwise—that God’s grace is not for you. That you don’t deserve his grace. That you’re not worthy. That you’re not good enough. The ironic thing is that all of those things are true. That’s exactly the point of grace. We aren’t worthy. We don’t deserve God’s forgiveness. We aren’t good enough. And because grace is counterintuitive we need to keep reminding ourselves of God’s grace and purposefully dwell in that grace. That’s why Paul urges young Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:1 *You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.* Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. Paul says essentially the same thing here. **Live in grace.**

**Transition**

Ten parting thoughts. Ten pearls. The necklace is complete.

**Conclusion**

- What church, with this necklace, wouldn't shine? Let's pray.