

“Ministry Diversity and the Centrality of Christ in the Local Assembly”
Issues of Opportunity - Understanding Personal Ministry

Author: Patrick J. Griffiths ©
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Title: “The Biblical Principle of Ecumenicalism and Excommunication”
Text: 1 Corinthians 16:19-24
Theme: The local church is to be a place of great comfort and celebration. It is, however, also a place where lines are clearly drawn and biblical confrontation takes place. Let us be careful that we do not tolerate those who would divide the local church. May God enable us to clearly confront the evil doer.

Intellect: There are many people external to our fellowship who should be embraced, and there are some within our fellowship who should be addressed.

Volition: We should identify those with whom we can network and we should identify those whom we must address.

Emotion: Let us love the Lord by loving those who love His church, and let us hate all who would attack our Lord by attacking His church.

Ecumenicalism defined: Ecumenicalism is the idea of promoting unity among churches or religions. The difficulty of unbridled ecumenicalism is when it seeks to promote unity with open unbelief. The positive to ecumenicalism is the idea of promoting unity among evangelical churches. There is a real and biblical unity that exists among all the justified that needs to be acknowledged on a horizontal level among all evangelical churches.

Excommunication defined: Excommunication is the act of banishing a member of the Church from the communion of believers and the privileges of the Church, cutting a person off from a religious society. This banishment is toward those who appear as wolves in sheep’s clothing.

The apostle is bringing his letter to a close.

¹⁹“The churches of Asia greet you, Aquila and Prisca greet you heartily in the Lord, with the church that is in their house. ²⁰All the brethren greet you. Greet one another with a holy kiss. ²¹The greeting is in my own hand – Paul. ²²If anyone does not love the Lord, let him be accursed. Maranatha. ²³The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you. ²⁴My love be with you all in Christ Jesus. Amen” (1 Cor. 16:19-24).

When Paul gives his closing words of greeting, he speaks for himself and for others. He is in Ephesus, a city of Asia, and so he greets the Corinthians for the Asian saints. Aquila and Prisca (Priscilla) are present with Paul in Ephesus, as they were with Paul in Corinth (see Acts 18:1-3), and so Paul includes a special words of greeting to the Corinthians from them.

In conclusion, Paul leaves us with three ideas. First, he speaks of the church connected. All believers are a part of one body. Second, he speaks of the church addressing those who do not love the Lord. Finally, he closes with a blessing. We will begin our study by noting his comments concerning the church's family.

I. The church's family (vv. 19-21)

In the closing remarks of the letter, Paul shows how churches are not independent but inter-dependent with other churches. I do not believe Paul believed every church looked the same in every detail, but there was something they held in common, and it was this common element that linked every church together. Notice the manner in which Paul expresses the Christian family.

Five times Paul uses the word "greet" inside of three verses. He moves from the largest group to the singular individual.

- A. The churches of Asia **greet** you
- B. The church that is in their house **greet**s you

Some would suggest that churches should meet in homes and should not build buildings for meeting. Churches met in homes because it was what they did in their culture. There is nothing wrong with a church meeting in a home, nor is there anything wrong with churches meeting in buildings. I do believe, however, that churches need to be careful as to the potential exclusive tone a house church can take on and as to poor financial stewarding a building can have.

- C. All the brethren **greet** you
- D. **Greet** one another
- E. The **greeting** is in my own hand - Paul

Paul's embrace is large and inclusive. The early church saw itself as a singular body with multiple expressions in various locations. When an individual becomes a Christian, they become a part of a family that is global. There is a collective solidarity, a unified community within the larger body of Christ, and this harmony is to exist on the local level.

Paul believes the church gathered should be a place where warmest expressions can be found without scandalous implications or overtones. The word used for "kiss" is related in word formation to **phileo**.

"So the meaning could be 'show affection outwardly, especially kiss.'" (W. Harold Mare, "1 Corinthians," *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, 10:297).

This is the word for "love" Paul will use in verse 22.

“In the synagogue men kissed men and women kissed women. This was the Christian custom at a later date and apparently so here. See 1 Thess. 5:26; 2 Cor. 13:12; 1 Pet. 5:14. It seems never to have been promiscuous between the sexes.” (A.T. Robertson’s Word Pictures)

“This kiss of fellowship was of the nature of a public ceremony and bore a public significance.” (R.C.H. Lenski, Commentary on the New Testament: 1 & 2 Corinthians, [Hendrickson, 1998, originally 1937 by Augsburg], 784).

“The kiss of respect and friendship was customary in the ancient East. When the Corinthians receive this letter and read it in church, Paul encourages them to give one another this kiss of affection as a pledge of their spirit of unity and forgiveness.” (W. Harold Mare, “1 Corinthians,” The Expositor’s Bible Commentary, 10:296).

Making it Personal (What’s the NEXT STEP?)

- How do we express our mutual love and forgiveness toward one another in a way that would be culturally relevant? How can we show this corporately as a sign of true community?
- How do we begin to reach beyond our local church to other local churches for the purpose of recognizing that we are all one in Christ? Quarterly prayer meetings with their leadership? Annual events where we can come together for a common idea?
- We should strive to make local church unity an intentional ministry of this fellowship as we would any other ministry expression.

II. The church’s militancy (v. 22)

As a grace fellowship, our embrace is large, diverse, and tolerant. But it is not without qualification or determination. There are boundaries and limits as to who we identify as Christians. Non-Christians do not love Jesus and will be separated from His covenant love forever. There are others who profess Christ, but seek to intentionally undermine His person, work, and word. These people are singled out by the apostle and left with a strong rebuke.

“A burden weighs on his heart as he utters the prayer which should close his letter, and by a sudden impulse of the Spirit he gives vent to the feeling of indignation which fills him at the thought of such Christians.” (Frederic Louis Godet, Commentary on First Corinthians, Kregel Reprint Library, 1979, 899).

“Paul’s heart still throbs with emotion which refuses to be suppressed. His spirit and his hand almost involuntarily react to all the perversions and all the abuses which he is attempting to correct in Corinth by means of this letter, and he records his apostolic verdict regarding all those who may dare to remain [obstinate] and to continue in their evil course.” (R.C.H. Lenski, Commentary on the New Testament: 1 & 2 Corinthians, [Hendrickson, 1998, originally 1937 by Augsburg], 786).

“Paul’s use of “if” assumes the reality of the condition (1st class condition). Paul distinguishes between two kinds of people: those who love the Lord and those who do not. It is this love for the Lord that sets His people apart from all others (John 13:34, 35). It is this love that motivates His people to obey and show forth the fruit of the Holy Spirit (John 14:15). What is of interest is the word chosen for love. He uses the Greek word **phileo** whose meaning is rooted more in the horizontal love one has for others and not the vertical love of **agape** that God has for His people. [Phileo] is not as strong a word as agape, and is never commanded to be given to God. An implication of this verse, however, is that such minimal affection is an element of the love that is acceptable to God. Paul’s choice of words in this passage flowed from his emphasis on affection. If a person does not love the Lord with tender affection, then he obviously has no supreme love for Him, and thus no part in Him at all.” (John MacArthur, 1 Corinthians, 488)

“Real Christians would show in the Christian community and in society some outward indications of their affection for and commitment to, the Lord. If some, as seemed to be the case, did not, they were showing by that that they did not belong to the Lord.” (W. Harold Mare, “1 Corinthians,” The Expositor’s Bible Commentary, 10:297).

Lest anyone think this is just a “warm fuzzy” closing, let them take note of the somber words of verse 22: “If anyone does not love the Lord, let him be accursed.” Paul very clearly distinguishes between saints and unbelievers. The difference he indicates here is that saints “love the Lord,” and (by inference) the rest do not. Upon those who do not “love the Lord,” Paul pronounces a curse.

“Such a person proves beyond doubt that he does not belong to the Lord and therefore does not belong in the fellowship of God’s people.” (John MacArthur, 1 Corinthians, 488)

“The word seems a bit harsh to us, but the refusal to love Christ on the part of a so-called Christian deserves anathema.” (A.T. Robertson’s Word Pictures) “Here Paul is bringing God himself to witness and is saying he who does not love and obey God is under God’s wrath.” (W. Harold Mare, “1 Corinthians,” The Expositor’s Bible Commentary, 10:297).

Since he is writing to the church at Corinth, I do not think he is cursing the unbelievers of Corinth in general; **I believe that Paul is pronouncing a curse upon those who falsely claim to be saints but who in reality are unbelieving sinners.** These are the ones living in sin and promoting it in the church. They are wolves in sheep’s clothing; they are messengers of Satan who appear as angels of light. John Calvin notes how Paul “is not speaking of strangers, who avowedly hated the Christian name, but of pretenders and hypocrites, who troubled the Churches for the sake of their own belly, or from empty boasting.” (John Calvin, Calvin’s Commentaries, “1 & 2 Corinthians,” 20:80).

He turns these “wolves” over to divine judgment. These are the same people described in 1 Corinthians 3:16, 17 and 11:29-32.

¹⁶ “Do you not know that you are a temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? ¹⁷ **If any man destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him**, for the temple of God is holy, and that is what you are” (1 Cor. 3:16, 17).

²⁹ “For he who eats and drinks, eats and **drinks judgment to himself if he does not judge the body rightly**. ³⁰ For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep. ³¹ But if we judged ourselves rightly, we would not be judged. ³² But when we are judged, **we are disciplined by the Lord so that we will not be condemned along with the world**” (1 Cor. 11:29-32).

Paul’s pronouncement of a curse on those who do not love the Lord are the same words found in his Epistle to the Galatians:

⁶ “I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel; ⁷ which is really not another; only there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. ⁸ But even though we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we have preached to you, ***let him be accursed***. ⁹ As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to that which you received, ***let him be accursed***” (Gal. 1:6-9, emphasis mine).

Let all such people find no comfort in Paul’s epistles or in their “ministries.” They are under the curse, as the Scriptures clearly indicate (see Galatians 1:6-9; 2 Peter 2 and 3; Jude 1:1-16).

Some think it matters little whether you attend one church or another. Paul’s words should be sobering. There are those, even within the local church, who do not know our Lord, and who seek to lead others astray from following Him. Paul cannot pronounce a blessing on such people, but a curse, and so he does.

The ministry of confronting wolves in sheep’s clothing is different than the invitation to bring sinners to Christ. There is a difference between those who are disciples and a part of the local church and those who are not. As elders, we need wisdom in the application of biblical truth to the circumstances we find ourselves in.

This is a difficult text, but one that warrants our attention. There are those within the church that must be met with stern warning. They do not love the Lord, and they are to be accursed. There is a biblical ministry of cursing wolves in sheep’s clothing. This sounds foreign to our ears, and rightly so. However, in the absence of such a ministry the local church will be overrun with unbelief and self-centered and self-serving rogues. There are several passages needing to be cited in order to put this idea in perspective and to assist in the facilitating of the charge.

Matthew 18:15-20

¹⁵ “If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. ¹⁶ But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that **BY THE MOUTH OF TWO OR THREE WITNESSES EVERY FACT MAY BE CONFIRMED**. ¹⁷ If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. ¹⁸ Truly I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven. ¹⁹ Again I say to you, that if two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by My Father who is in heaven. ²⁰ For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst” (Matt. 18:15-20).

This passage has several salient features. First, the individual is addressed as a believer, but if non-repentance continues and there is a persistency in their pattern of sin, then they are to be treated as an unbeliever. This strongly suggests that repentance is a sign of new life in Christ. This same idea is present in 1 Corinthians 5:11 where the offender is labeled a “so-called” brother. Second, there appears a progression in approaching those who transgress. The severity of the confrontation increases as the sinner becomes more adamant in their attitude. Third, the leadership within the local church has authority to pronounce judgment on the individual. It is through the witness of two or three that confirm the sentence against the individual.

2 Corinthians 13:1-6

¹ “This is the third time I am coming to you. **EVERY FACT IS TO BE CONFIRMED BY THE TESTIMONY OF TWO OR THREE WITNESSES**. ² I have previously said when present the second time, and though now absent I say in advance to those who have sinned in the past and to all the rest as well, that if I come again I will not spare anyone, ³ since you are seeking for proof of the Christ who speaks in me, and who is not weak toward you, but mighty in you. ⁴ For indeed He was crucified because of weakness, yet He lives because of the power of God. For we also are weak in Him, yet we will live with Him because of the power of God directed toward you. ⁵ Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you--unless indeed you fail the test? ⁶ But I trust that you will realize that we ourselves do not fail the test” (2 Cor. 13:1-6).

Like Matthew 18, in this passage Paul recognizes that some who are causing division within the local church might not be believers. In an age of accommodation, it is difficult for local churches to stand against those who would bring disunity into the family. **Notice also the similarity with the two or three witnesses**. No one individual is to have the power to carry out the ministry of correction and reproof.

Romans 16:17, 18

¹⁷ “Now I urge you, brethren, keep your eye on those who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned, and turn away from them. ¹⁸ For such men are slaves, not of our Lord Christ but of their own appetites; and by their smooth and flattering speech they deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting” (Rom. 16:17, 18).

In the face of non-repentance, the local church is to mark those who are divisive and produce obstacles to the growth and unity of the church. Such people as these are to be shunned. They are to be avoided.

Galatians 6:1, 2

¹ “Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted. ² Bear one another's burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ” (Gal. 6:1, 2).

Here it appears that believers are being addressed. This individual has been caught from behind. Although concession has been made and a window of opportunity provided, the temptation acted on has taken the individual farther than they desired to go, kept them longer than they wanted to stay, and has cost them more than they wished to pay. This person needs help extracting themselves from the pit of sin into which they have fallen and have become mired in. He is repentant and is seeking restoration and healing. This person is out of joint and needs attention. Like the individual in 1 Thessalonians 5, restoration and repair are the goal.

1 Thessalonians 5:11-15

¹¹ “Therefore encourage one another and build up one another, just as you also are doing. ¹² But we request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction, ¹³ and that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Live in peace with one another. ¹⁴ We urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with everyone. ¹⁵ See that no one repays another with evil for evil, but always seek after that which is good for one another and for all people” (1 Thess. 5:11-15).

The context identifies the audience as believers. The word “unruly” speaks of being “unarranged” or “insubordinate.” This exact word is used only here in the New Testament. A “sibling” word is used by Paul in 2 Thessalonians 3:6, 11. A.T. Robertson notes how leadership is to “Put sense into the unruly mob who break ranks (a privative and taktos, verbal adjective of tassô, to keep military order).” From the passage those admonished are beginning to “fall out of rank.” They are miss-stepping. They are to be cautioned, warned, confronted. It is as if they are drifting and need to be awakened to their condition.

2 Thessalonians 3:6, 10-12, 14, 15

⁶ “Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from every brother who leads an unruly life and not according to the tradition which you received from us” (2 Thess. 3:6).

¹⁰ “For even when we were with you, we used to give you this order: if anyone is not willing to work, then he is not to eat, either. ¹¹ For we hear that some among you are leading an undisciplined life, doing no work at all, but acting like busybodies. ¹² Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to work in quiet fashion and eat their own bread. ¹⁴ If anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of that person and do not associate with him, so that he will be put to shame. ¹⁵ Yet do not regard him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother” (2 Thess. 3:10-12, 14, 15).

The word “unruly” is also used in verse 11. It comes from the same word used by Paul in 1 Thessalonians 5:14. Again, it speaks of those who have broken rank. They are drifting away from following Christ. Second Thessalonians 3:11 uses the word “undisciplined” to describe their life. There is a progression from what began in 1 Thessalonians 5:14 and what is happening here. If the unruly when approached do not repent, they are to be removed from the fellowship. It is safe to assume that the necessary steps as outlined in Matthew 18 have taken place. The brother has been approached on several occasions and with each approach the hardening of heart has taken place. This person, in light of non-repentance, is to be considered as an unbeliever.

2 Timothy 3:1-9

¹ “But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come. ² For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, ³ unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, ⁴ treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, ⁵ holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power; Avoid such men as these. ⁶ For among them are those who enter into households and captivate weak women weighed down with sins, led on by various impulses, ⁷ always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. ⁸ Just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so these men also oppose the truth, men of depraved mind, rejected in regard to the faith. ⁹ But they will not make further progress; for their folly will be obvious to all, just as Jannes' and Jambres' folly was also” (2 Tim. 3:1-9).

In 1 and 2 Thessalonians, the conduct or lifestyle of the individual is noted. Here in 2 Timothy, it is explained. The unruly or undisciplined are noted as lovers of self, lovers of money, lovers of pleasure, rather than lovers of God. The reason why these individuals need to be addressed is because of the damage they inflict on the local fellowship.

2 Timothy 4:2-4

² “preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction. ³ For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, ⁴ and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths” (2 Tim. 4:2-4).

Those who are not willing to obey Christ and openly follow Him are to be addressed through private communication and in the public proclamation of the Word.

Titus 1:9-14

⁹ “holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, so that he will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict. ¹⁰ For there are many rebellious men, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision, ¹¹ who must be silenced because they are upsetting whole families, teaching things they should not teach for the sake of sordid gain. ¹² One of themselves, a prophet of their own, said, “Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons.” ¹³ This testimony is true. For this reason reprove them severely so that they may be sound in the faith, ¹⁴ not paying attention to Jewish myths and commandments of men who turn away from the truth” (Titus 1:9-14).

Those who would oppose the truth of Scripture must be silenced. They must be severely reprovved in order that restoration might take place. All of this is to be understood in the larger context of the entire New Testament. If those who are speaking against the leadership and the church refuse to be silenced, then they are to be shunned and treated as unbelievers. The goal of all reproof is restoration to the faith and the family. Yet unity must not be maintained at the expense of truth.

Titus 3:9, 10

⁹ “But avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and strife and disputes about the Law, for they are unprofitable and worthless. ¹⁰ Reject a factious man after a first and second warning, ¹¹ knowing that such a man is perverted and is sinning, being self-condemned” (Titus 3:9, 10).

The word “factious” is our word “heretic.” The idea is that of being schismatic. This person brings schism to the local church. This person, after having gone through the process of Matthew 18, is to be rejected. The New Testament shows the rejecting of the non-repentant to be a part of body life. None of this is pleasant, but it is necessary.

2 John 10, 11

¹⁰“If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house, and do not give him a greeting; ¹¹ for the one who gives him a greeting participates in his evil deeds” (2 John 10, 11).

The elders are to be on guard against those who would disrupt the fellowship by bringing in teaching that is contrary to that of the New Testament. These people are not to be given a platform for the promotion of their error. They are to be “cut off from the community of faith.” John Calvin notes how “there is nothing that is more pernicious, than that class of persons, who prostitute a profession of piety to their own depraved affections.” (John Calvin, Calvin’s Commentaries, “1 & 2 Corinthians,” 20:80).

Where does this leave us?

- The leadership and congregation must embrace the biblical necessity for this ministry.
- Individuals must follow the pattern of Matthew 18 in communicating to the unruly their concerns in private.
- The leadership must follow the pattern of Matthew 18.
- The church must recognize the unrepentant and collectively shun them in order to secure their salvation or restoration to the family through repentance.
- The church must work with other churches to keep the non-repentant from disrupting their fellowships. The severity of the action is in order to restore them to the faith.

Making it Personal (What’s the NEXT STEP? Let’s make it real practical)

- Who do you know right now who is out of step and needs to be addressed?
- Whether it involves a husband’s behavior toward his wife and/or child(ren), or his failure to work for a living, or an addiction to pornography, or substance abuse, or maybe he is no longer coming to church, this person needs to be addressed by their friends, in private, for the purpose of restoring them to the faith.
- We must begin a process of being the body to one another, and this happens when we truly love the Lord and His church.
- I do not believe we are to be calling curses down upon the heads of the unbelieving.
- I do believe we are to warn those within a fellowship who appear as angels of light but are deceptive wolves in sheep’s clothing. These people are destructive to body unity.
- It is the responsibility of biblical shepherds to guard the flock of God and we must be on the alert against such self-deceived unbelievers.

Notice how Paul finishes verse 22 with “Maranatha.” I believe John MacArthur offers a legitimate idea concerning the use of this word in this context. Please note the following statement:

“I believe that in this context ‘maranatha,’ an Aramaic term meaning ‘Our Lord, come,’ is Paul’s appeal for the Lord to come and take away those who are accursed, the nominal, false Christians who are always such a great threat to the true church. the idea is, ‘God, come and remove them’ before they cause more harm.” (John MacArthur, 1 Corinthians, 488)

Lenski concurs.

“This cry or prayer also fits the context. It appeals to the Lord to come and to visit the anathema upon all whose hearts turn away from him.” (R.C.H. Lenski, Commentary on the New Testament: 1 & 2 Corinthians, [Hendrickson, 1998, originally 1937 by Augsburg], 788).

“Hence with the words Anathema Maranatha the Jews began their papers of excommunication.” (John Calvin, Calvin’s Commentaries, “1 & 2 Corinthians,” 20:81).

We struggle with the administration of stern warning but when motivated by love and done in love they are occasions of Christ revealed. “Paul wants the whole Corinthians church to know that, in spite of the stern way in which he has had to rebuke them, he really loves them.” (W. Harold Mare, “1 Corinthians,” The Expositor’s Bible Commentary, 10:297).

III. The church’s benediction (vv. 23, 24)

Remember, the fellowship is divided over many things. Paul’s solution to a divided fellowship is not doctrinal conformity, but unconditional love. This is his point in chapters 12-14. He charges the fellowship to love. It is in this larger context that we have his concluding comments.

“Paul appeals to that invisible power of grace which alone can render effectual the prayers contained in the greeting of verse 21.” (Frederic Louis Godet, Commentary on First Corinthians, Kregel Reprint Library, 1979, 899).

“The apostle’s great heart swells once more. Whatever other emotions he has shown in writing this letter, love is the deepest, richest of them all. And it embraces all the Corinthians, those who distress his heart as well as those who delight his heart. Back of every one of his admonitions to them stands his heart of love.” (R.C.H. Lenski, Commentary on the New Testament: 1 & 2 Corinthians, [Hendrickson, 1998, originally 1937 by Augsburg], 790).

I find Paul’s words in verse 21 of interest, “I Paul write this greeting with my own hand.” We might very easily pass them by as insignificant, but I believe they are important. If his words were paraphrased in the terminology of our culture, he would

be saying, "I, Paul, greet you with my own handwriting, and not by the use of my word processor." Of course, there were no computers or word processors in his day, but there was a human equivalent, called an amanuenses (i.e. secretaries). These were ancient secretaries who took dictation from the writer. I believe Paul writes with his own hand (as he often indicates) to validate his epistle as coming from him personally. He expects them to recognize his handwriting as his own. Furthermore, I believe he does so to show them how much he cares for them. There is something about a personal note that no fax, e-mail, or mail merge letter can reproduce. Paul has gone to considerable effort to communicate with these saints, because he cares deeply about them.

Upon those who are of the household of faith, Paul pronounces this blessing: "The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you" (verse 23).

"The letter begins with the salutation 'Grace to you' and concludes the same way. Grace is the beginning and the end of the Christian gospel; it is the single word that most fully expresses what God has done and will do for his people in Christ Jesus." (Gordon D. Fee, The First Epistle to the Corinthians, NICNT, [Eerdmans, 1987], 839).

For those who have trusted in Jesus Christ for salvation, there is the blessing of God's grace. That grace is initially experienced in the forgiveness of our sins, and it is subsequently to be experienced by the Christian every moment of every day. And it is with this blessing and the assurance of his love that Paul concludes this epistle.

Making it Personal (What's the NEXT STEP?)

- Are you firmly rooted in and consumed by the love of Christ?
- Does His love dominate your thinking?
- If you cannot act without love, then be careful in your correction.