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Signs of Love in the Fellowship

16: 15-24

Signs of love in the fellowship DIG: What are the seven signs of love? What should the Corinthians imitate regarding Stephanas and the others mentioned here? Why should believers be submitted to godly leadership? Why should believers show hospitality?

REFLECT: Given all the hard things Paul wrote to this church, how do you account for the warmth in these verses? How addicted are you to minister to others for love's sake? What will you take away from this study of First Corinthians? Who can you help this week?

Let everything you do be done in love.



In many ways these verses flow out of, and illustrate, the command of **16:14**, “**Let everything you do be done in love.**” **Paul’s** closing words are not simply polite words that **he** threw in at the end of **his** letter as a matter of custom or courtesy. As much as any part of Scripture, they are part of **God’s Word** and are given to us for a divine purpose. In these ten verses, either directly or indirectly, **Paul** is talking about **love** in the fellowship of the Church. Because **the Corinthians’** greatest need was for unconditional **love**, that was **Paul’s** last appeal to **them**. Under the surface of **Paul’s** closing remarks, we see **seven signs of love** in the fellowship. These apparently “loose ends” have a harmonious theme, as **Paul** demonstrates the attitude of **love he** desired **them** to have.

1. Evangelism: Now, brothers, you know that the household of Stephanas were the firstfruits (see the commentary on **Leviticus**, to see [link click Ea - Resheet](#)), the first people in Achaia to put their trust in the Messiah (**16:15a**). You might remember that in **1:16** Paul wrote: **Oh yes, I did also immerse Stephanas and his household.** We know nothing specific about **Stephana's family**. But we do know that at the time **Paul** wrote **First Corinthians**, **Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus** were visiting with **Paul** (**16:17**). It is quite possible that **they** were the ones who delivered the letter from **Corinth** to **Paul** in which **they** asked **him** the questions that **Paul** answered in **Chapters 7-16**.⁵³⁶

Someone has said, "Evangelism is the weeping of **God**." Evangelism is the anguished cry of **Messiah** over a doomed **Jerusalem** (**John 11:35**). Evangelism is the call of **Moshe** to **ADONAI**, "**Please! These people have committed a terrible sin! But if you won't [atone for their sin], then, I beg you, blot me out of your book which you have written**" (**Exodus 32:31**)! Evangelism is the heartbroken cry of **Paul**, "**My grief is so great, the pain in my heart so constant, that I could wish myself actually under God's curse and separated from Messiah, if it would help my brothers, my own flesh and blood, the people of Isra'el** (**Romans 9:2-4a**)! Evangelism is the cry of John Knox, "Give me Scotland for **Christ** or I die." Evangelism is the weeping in the night of parents of an unsaved child. We need to ask **God** for that kind of **love**. We often give up too easily when those to whom we witness resist the gospel, and in doing so we betray the thinness of our **love**.

*Dear Great and Awesome Eternal **Father God**, Praise **You** for giving **Your** children the opportunity to work alongside **Your** mighty power in evangelism. It is such a joy to tell others about **You**! Yes, sometimes when we share about how great and loving **You** are, we are laughed at or mocked; but sometimes the seed of **Your love** takes root and a new believer is born who will spend all eternity with **You**. Please help us to remember that when the prospect of being laughed at is making us quiet about **You**, the consequence of rejecting **You** is eternity in hell, so we must pray and keep lovingly sharing about **Your** greatness and **love**!*

*Prayer is so important to do before opening our mouths to share about you, so that you may prepare the soil of the person's heart (**Matthew 13:1-7**). Prayer is crucial for **You** to do a mighty work in opening up their heart to want to hear and receive the truth of **Your love**. It is not our words that are so important. **Your** mighty power and strength is needed to work in the person's mind and heart to see the truth of our words about **You**. Prayer continues to be important as we pray for **You** to bring circumstances and people into the life of our family and friends that they might be saved.*

*Our hearts are so burdened for our family members and friends who know about **You** - but have no relationship with **You**. I am thinking of family members whose names are . . . and friends whose names are . . . Please do whatever it takes to bring them to bend the knee in **love** and worship of **You**. May **You** bring events and people into their lives that take them from “knowing about **You**” to “loving and following **You**” as their **Lord and Savior**. May **You** continue to pursue them. Thank **You**! In **Yeshua’s** holy name and power of **His** resurrection. Amen.*

2. Service: Another sign of **love** can be seen in the deep concern **Stephanas and his household** had for **fellow believers**. **And they have devoted** (Greek: *tasso*, meaning *appointed or determined, even addicted*) **themselves to serving** (Greek: *diakonia*, from which we get the English word **deacon**) **God’s people (16:15b)**. **Stephanas and his household** did not wait to be appointed. **They** appointed **themselves to serve fellow believers**. **They** spontaneously assigned **themselves** to help meet any need **they** saw among **God’s people**. **Their service** was self-motivated, self-*appointed*, and self-sacrificing. Though it was sometimes necessary for the early Messianic Community to assign tasks, as with the appointment of **deacons**, most ministry was done, and still is done, by those who simply see a need and meet it.

Because of its association with drug abuse, the term *addiction* today has an unfavorable connotation. But it is appropriate to the type of **service Paul** is talking about here. **The apostle himself** was addicted to **the Lord’s** work and strongly encouraged all **believers** to be like **him**. **Paul** did **the Lord’s** work habitually, out of a powerful, driving compulsion. The more **he** ministered the more **he** felt compelled to minister. **His** tolerance for godly work caused **him** never to be satisfied with what **he** was doing, much less with what **he** had done. **He** became dependent on **the Lord’s** work in order to function. He could not live normally if he were not engaged in some needed service for **His Lord, for the Lord’s people**, or for the unsaved. I am sure that, had **he** tried to “take it easy” and relax for any length of time, **he** would have had severe “withdrawal symptoms.” **He** was not a workaholic, compelled to work for work’s sake. **He** was addicted to ministry for **love’s** sake.

3. Submission: We are to **submit ourselves** not only to appointed leaders in the local congregation but to all those who faithfully do **the Lord’s** work. In fact, proper submission is the key to Spirit-filled living. All **believers** are to **submit to one another in fear of Messiah**. **Wives are to submit to their husbands (Ephesians 5:21-22)**. **Children are to submit to their parents (Ephesians 6:1-3)**. **Believers are to submit to governing authorities and ordinances (Romans 13:1; First Peter 2:13)**. Younger men **are to submit** to older men (**First Peter 5:5a**). Every **believer** is to be **submissive** in the ways

ADONAI has ordained. **Humility** will prevent the **submitting** person from becoming burdened, and the person **submitted** to from becoming overbearing. **All of you should clothe yourselves in humility toward one another, because God opposes the arrogant, but to the humble He gives grace (First Peter 5:5b).** When we are **humble, God's grace** gives us graciousness in our leading and graciousness in our following.

Paul wanted the selfish, unsubmitive **Corinthians to submit** to **his** model, just as **he** continually **submitted himself** to **Messiah's** model. **We** are called **to submit ourselves** to **those** who have proved **their own submission** to **Messiah**. Who is that **person** to whom we should **submit**? It is **anyone** who faithfully portrays and proclaims **the Word of God** or serves in **His** ministry. **I urge you to submit yourselves to people like these and to everyone who works and toils with them (16:16).** **Messiah's people** are not to fight for **their** own rights, privileges, and respect, but are to seek out and follow those to whom **they** can **submit in Messiah**, who can be **their** teachers and examples. True **love** brings true **submission**.⁵³⁷

4. Companionship: Another wonderful sign of loving fellowship is companionship. It is not something we directly do or give; it's a by-product of other things. Things as simple as standing with a friend who is in trouble or sitting with someone who is sick, or as complex as mutual ministry. The main ingredient of companionship is togetherness. **Paul** was grateful that **his** three friends had come from **Corinth** to be with **him**. **I am glad that Stephanas and Fortunatus and Achaicus are here. They** had ministered to **Paul** in that **they** had **made up for the apostle's fellow Corinthians not being there** with **him** in **Ephesus (16:17)**. But more than that, **they** genuinely befriended **Paul**, by being with **him**, by encouraging **him**, and by identifying with **his** ministry. In so doing **they refreshed Paul's spirit** and **the spirit** of the **Corinthian** church who had sent **them**.

ADONAI not only has made us for **Himself**, but has made us for each other. What the three friends from **Corinth** did for **Paul** is what **Yeshua** promises to do for **us**. **Paul** used the same word (Greek: *anapauo*, meaning *refreshed*) in this passage that **Yeshua** used in promising **rest** to those who believe in **Him**: **Come to me, all of you who are struggling and burdened, and I will give you rest (Matthew 11:28).** **Paul's** friends helped **the** hard-pressed **apostle** find **rest** and **refreshment**. **They** helped **him** lighten his burdens just by being with **him**. Because **they** came from a church that was not known for **love** or companionship, those three men doubtlessly gave **Paul** a special **spiritual** boost. **Like cold water to a weary soul, so is good news from a distant land (Proverbs 25:25 NASB).** **Stephanas and Fortunatus and Achaicus** were themselves **Paul's good news** from **Corinth, cold water to his weary spirit.**

The kind of companionship those **men** offered **refreshed** everyone involved. **They** not only **refreshed Paul**, but **they** also **refreshed the Corinthians**. **They have refreshed my spirit, just as they have yours (16:18a)**. When **Titus** personally reported to **Paul the good news** of the **Corinthian** church's change of heart and repentance of rebelliousness, **Paul** wrote to tell the church of **his** joy that now **they** too were **refreshing** others with **their** fellowship: **For this reason we have been comforted. And besides our comfort, we rejoiced even much more for the joy of Titus, because his spirit has been refreshed by you all (2 Corinthians 7:13)**.

5. Respect: I want you to show appreciation (Greek: *epiginosko*, meaning *to know exactly, to recognize or to acknowledge*) **for people like Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus (16:18b)**. **Paul** used the term to tell **the Corinthians** to **acknowledge that what he was writing to them is a command of the Lord (14:37)**. Now **he** tells **them** to **show appreciation** and recognize those faithful, godly workers for exactly what they were. **Paul** was not speaking of setting up ornate plaques or statues inscribed with **their** names on it. **He** was simply calling for **respect** and **appreciation**, which sometimes would be in public and sometimes in private. Proper **appreciation** of deserving people in the congregations of **God** is not wrong, but it is pleasing to **the Lord**.

Typically, **the Corinthians** were neither **respectful** nor appreciative. Most were too concerned about his or her own prestige and recognition. They were much more inclined to criticize each other than to build each other up. They were quick to claim: **I follow Paul**, or **I follow Apollos**, or **I follow Peter**, or **I follow the Messiah (1:12)**, but **they** used those names in pride, not in **appreciation**. **Paul** was not respected by many of **the Corinthians**, who had **become arrogant (4:6 and 18, 8:1, 13:4)**, **as though he were not coming back** to correct them in person (**4:18**). Some, apparently, had questioned **his** apostleship and **his** authority to teach **them** or to be supported by **them (9:1-6)**.

The **Corinthian** church had members who were like **Diotrphes**, a person **John** describes as one **who loves to be first among them and does not accept what we say**. **Diotrphes** was even jealous of the gentle, loving apostle **John**. **He** not only ridiculed and maligned **John himself** but also the representatives **John** had sent on **his** behalf (**Third John 9-10**). Such a person is not godly, no matter how humanly talented and capable he may be, and **should not be imitated**. **Demetrius**, on the other hand, had **received a good testimony from everyone, and from the truth itself (Third John 11-12)**. **He** is the sort of **believer** we should imitate, **respect** and **appreciate**, **so that we may share in their work for the truth (Third John 8)**.

Epaphroditus was the sort of godly person to be emulated and acknowledged. **“Therefore, receive him in the Lord with joy,” Paul told the Philippians, “and hold men like him in high regard. Epaphroditus was the epitome of the unselfish, sacrificial servant. He had served Paul on behalf of the Philippian church, just as Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaïus had served him on behalf of the Corinthian church. For he risked his life and nearly died working for the Messiah (Philippians 2:29-30 NASB).**

Those worthy of honor do not seek it. What makes **them** honorable is **their humility** before **the Lord** in **their** service for **Him**. But though **they** do not desire honor, those **they** teach and serve should give **them** honor. To give such honor is pleasing to **God**. **Respect those who are working hard among you . . . treat them with the highest regard and love because of the work they are doing (First Thessalonians 5:12-13).** In writing to Timothy, Paul said: **The leaders who lead well should be considered worthy of double honor, especially those working hard at communicating the Word and teaching (First Timothy 5:17).**

God’s design for the Church is simple. **The godly** are to be in leadership. **They** rule, **they** teach, **they** admonish, **they** set the example. **They** are chosen because **they** are especially submissive to **the Lord**. The rest of the congregations of **God** are to **submit** to **them**, in **respect**, honor, and **love**. **The leaders** are accountable to **ADONAI** for **their** leadership, and the rest are accountable to **the Lord** for **submitting** and respecting that leadership. **Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your lives, as people who will have to render an account. So make it a task of joy for them, not one of groaning; for that is of no advantage to you (Hebrews 13:17).** If we do not follow and honor those who have rightful leadership, we not only frustrate and inhibit their fruitfulness, but our own as well. We cannot properly serve **the Lord** if we do not **respect** **godly leaders**.

6. Hospitality: **The congregations in the province of Asia send greetings to you (16:19a).** As implied in these verses, **love** always produces **hospitality, love** for strangers. **Paul** did not make idle comments, much less stretch the truth, in order to impress **his** readers. It was not that **the congregations in the province of Asia** necessarily had sent formal **greetings** to the church at **Corinth**, but **he** was passing on genuine greetings. Those churches were honestly concerned for **their** fellow believers in **Corinth**, and their leaders asked **Paul** to greet **them** when **he** had the opportunity. Most of those involved were strangers to each other, but the **love** expressed was no less genuine because of that.

In the early Church the homes of **believers** were used for almost every type of activity for

believers - for **eating together (Acts 2:4-6)**; for **teaching and preaching (Acts 5:42)**; for **evangelism (Acts 10:23, 27-48)**; for **worship (Acts 20:7)**; and for **witnessing and discussion (Acts 28:23)**. Often **the home of a believer** was the regular meeting place for worship and fellowship. It was on behalf of **the church house of Aquila and Priscilla with the congregation that meets in their house**, that **Paul sent greetings to Corinth (16:19b)**.

When believers traveled from place to place in the B'rit Chadashah they could expect, almost without exception, to be entertained with great care and **love** by fellow **believers**. There were no strangers among **believers (Acts 2:42-46)**. **Hospitality** was second nature, a matter of course, a natural outgrowth of their **love** for **Messiah** and for all who belonged to **Him**. The home of every **believer** today should be open, transparent, and a loving haven for those who need **hospitality**.

The outstanding sign of **the Good Samaritan** was **hospitality** (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ Gw - The Parable of the Good Samaritan**). Both directly and indirectly **he** did everything in **his** power to assist the man who was beaten and robbed. Because **he felt compassion, he came upon him; and when he saw him, he was moved with compassion. So he went up to him, put oil and wine on his wounds and bandaged them. Then he set him on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. The next day, he took out two days' wages, gave them to the innkeeper and said, "Look after him; and if you spend more than this, I'll pay you back when I return" (Luke 10:33-35)**. The supreme sign of being a believing neighbor is **hospitality**; and **hospitality** is a notable sign of **love** in the life of a believer.⁵³⁸

7. Affection: Greet one another with a holy kiss (16:20). This has definite cultural overtones. It was customary in biblical times, and even today in some Middle Eastern countries, for men to greet men with a **kiss** on the cheek, and for women to do the same for women. It was purely an expression of sincere affection between two **believers**, with no sexual significance whatsoever.

Now, I Sha'ul, greet you in my own handwriting (16:22a). **Paul** would commonly use a scribe to write **his** letters. **Paul's** heart still throbbed with emotion which refused to be suppressed. Before **he** added the customary benediction as **his** last word (**Galatians 6:18; Philipians 4:23; First Thessalonians 5:28; Second Thessalonians 3:18** and **Philemon 25**), **his spirit** and **his pen** almost involuntarily react to all the abuses which **he** was attempting to correct in **Corinth**, and **he** recorded **his** apostolic verdict regarding all those who would dare to remain hard-hearted and to continue in **their** rebellion (see the

commentary on **Hebrews As - Today, If You Hear His Voice, Do Not Harden Your Hearts**).⁵³⁹

There were **unbelievers** drawn to the pagan practices in the congregation at **Corinth**. **Paul** issues **them** a final warning. **If anyone** who had not stepped over the line from mere head knowledge to faith, and **does not** have even so much as personal attachment or **brotherly affection** (Greek: *phileo*) for **the Lord**, let **him** understand that **he** is in danger of having a **curse** (Greek: *anathema*) placed **on him (16:22b)**! It is the same word used in reference to those **Judaizers** in **Galatia** (see the commentary on **Galatians Ag - Who Were the Judaizers?**) who were wreaking havoc in the churches there (see the commentary on **Galatians Aj - No Other Gospel**). Strong language by anyone's standard, but appropriate language gives the eternal consequences of leading someone away from **Messiah** and causing dissension in the Church. The Greek word *anathema* comes from the Hebrew concept of *cherem*, meaning *untouchable* and *devoted for destruction*.⁵⁴⁰

Marana, ta! [Our Lord, come!]! The Greek *maranatha*, **Marana ta (16:22c)**, is a transliteration of two Aramic words which must have been a common expression in the Greek congregations. This resembles: **Come Lord Yeshua (Revelation 22:20)**. That the **Lord Yeshua** may come at any moment should have spurred the careless to listen to **Paul's** warning and encourage everyone to expect the promises of **ADONAI** to be fulfilled. This rallying cry is consistent with the warm **greeting** in the final **two verses**.⁵⁴¹

All of **Paul's** letters close with a **grace-benediction**. **May the grace of the Lord Yeshua be with you. My love** (Greek: *agape*, meaning *God's unconditional love*) **is with you all, in union with the Messiah Yeshua (16:23-24)**. **Paul** sincerely wanted the best for this group of Messianic followers. **Grace** is the beginning and the end of the gospel; it is the single word that most fully expresses what **God** has done and will do for **His children in Messiah**; nothing is deserved, everything is freely given. Given that reality, the concluding expression of **Paul's** own unconditional **love** for **the Corinthians** is all the more striking. Although sincere, it was also likely it was added to soften the blow of what at times had been a very harsh letter, in which **he** and **they** had been at odds on almost every issue every step of the way. To write as **he** did, did not mean that **he loved them** less, but more. As a result, along with the benediction of **grace** from **the Lord**, **he** affirms that **his own love** is also **with them**. What makes all this possible are the final words **in union with Messiah Yeshua**. Just as **Paul** began the letter (**1:1-3**), so **he** concludes by reminding **them** that **their** common life together, and thus **his love** for **them**, only takes place as **they** and **he** are together **in union with Messiah Yeshua**.⁵⁴²