

BIBLICAL LOVE

1 Corinthians 13

Introduction

STBC Church anniversary: Second Sunday of February

When church was beginning, I was often asked this question: What are the distinctives of this church going to be? The initial answer was that this church would be Biblical. The pushback I got was that every church says it is going to be Biblical. So we dug a little deeper and came up with these three distinctives: We are going to be about:

1. Word - according to John 1 - based on the Word of God; Bible
2. Worship - in the sense of Romans 12:1 - obedience and service
3. Love - 1 Cor. 13 - if we have all the other things down but we don't have love, we have nothing.

READ: 1 Corinthians 13

Outline

- I. Centrality of Love v. 1-3
- II. Characteristics of Love v. 4-7
- III. Constancy of Love v. 8-12
- IV. Conclusion v. 13

Context

What was this chapter was about? This was written to the church in the city of Corinth.

Acts 18: Paul founded church at Corinth spent 1.5 years (2nd missionary journey). This letter to the Corinthians was written about three years later while on 3rd journey, anticipating a return visit

The city of Corinth: A sin soaked society seriously seeking self-satisfaction

Church: this self satisfaction had moved into the church in the way people were dealing with each other. This is the reason Paul wrote the letter.

Disunity (1:12), revealed in gatherings; they are starting to segregate based on leadership.

Turn to **Chapter 12**: Disunity is creeping into the the church in how they dealt with each other, how they took the Lord's Supper and in one particular area - spiritual gifts.

Paul teaching on spiritual gifts (12); read v. 4-8a, 12, 20-21, 28

- Transition in verse: **12:31**: more excellent way than focusing on the gifts - transition into chapter 13
- Transition out verse: **14:1**: with love, priority of teaching
- Thus, this "Love Chapter" is about the church (God's bride), not a focus on marriage
- This chapter is used in weddings (Illustration: Secular friend's wedding), Valentine's Day but this is not the biblical context
- Marriage is addressed in **Chapter 7**.
- Context Challenge: Our challenge is not to think of spouse, but to think of a person sitting on the other side of church
- How are we going to demonstrate this love and live this out within the church?

I. Centrality of Love (v. 1-3)

Paul uses 6 illustrations or specific examples of spiritual gifts or acts of service within church. This is a further demonstration of what is on the mind of Paul is the church.

- 1) Eloquent speaker
- 2) Prophecy/teaching God's truth
- 3) Knowledge - theologian, understands great doctrinal truths

4) Faith - that can move mountains

5) Mercy - particularly to the poor

6) Ultimate gift: Martyrdom

These gifts describes a great church - on the surface.

- But Paul says that if you have all of this, but don't have love, you are missing something.

- Paul's point: Everything within the church must have at its central core: love

- Illustration: Star Trek Enterprise Warp Core. You can have a charismatic captain, a smart Vulcan science officer, and lots of disposable crewmen, but without a warp core, the ship is going nowhere.

- Paul is not saying do not have these characteristics in the church but we must have love or we are going nowhere.

Words used when love is absent show depth of futility when love absent.

Without love:

- Eloquent speaker thinks he is pleasing his audience

- But really he is a noisy gong, an annoying sound

- Next three on list are very important to the church, 14:1

- teaches, has knowledge, has faith - they are the ones up front, they get recognized but if their motivation in service is about getting attention and they don't have love, they may think they are somebody, but Paul says "I am nothing" without love.

- Last two: mercy give to the poor and martyrdom - but if you are giving to get something back - "no profit or gain"

Love must be central to all aspects of the church.

II. Characteristics of Love (v. 4-7)

Word itself: Paul uses the Greek word “agape” - means decisive demonstration of devoted dedication.

- In the Greek literature at the time, this word was seldom used because the Greeks didn’t really know or apply the depths of that word
- to have agape love, it has to be of the mind - there is a choice and then you act based on your decision to love
- it doesn’t come natural to demonstrate love so it is a decision
- there is a commitment - devoted, loyalty
- a dedication with the mindset of sacrifice

Only other Greek word for love in New Testament is “phileo” - which means an affinity toward another; a likemindedness

Illustration : A U of A Wildcat basketball fan ‘loves’ (phileo) being with other like minded fans

Example of the contrast: **John 21:15-17, 20**

Paul could stop here with self-sacrifice, not self-satisfaction

But he includes the positives:

Be patient and kind. We know what that is.

Again, Paul could stop here.

But he does not. He also gives us some wonderful examples on the negative side to tell us what agape love doesn’t look like:

Jealous, brag, arrogant, unbecoming (rude), seek its own, provoked (easily angered/irritable), take into account a wrong (keep record of a wrong), rejoice in unrighteousness. If you did a biblical study, you could find each of these negatives tied to a situation going on in the church of Corinth: disunity, gifts, specific sins, Lord’s Supper

Example: 1 Cor 8:1-13

- a piece of meat offered to idols - we know this is not anything special, it has not been changed in any way but some have been using their knowledge to abuse others around them

- knowledge without love puffs up

- do not give up knowledge, put apply knowledge with love

- Paul says that if meat causes his brother to stumble, he won't eat it - that is self sacrifice - he knows that it means nothing but he is willing to do it and he is calling the church to demonstrate this kind of love - even when they know more than the other person

v. 7 - Paul gives us one more aspect to the characteristics: circumstances for demonstrating love

“All things” shows that love occurs all the time, not segregated part of life

- Bears (takes work; takes energy; idea of sharing the load)
- Believes (trusts)
- Hopes (optimistic, positive outlook)
- Endures (faces adversity)

Do not get distracted by the definition or characteristics of love because God made it really simple:

Golden Rule: Lev. 19: “Love your neighbor as yourself”

Matthew 7:12: “Treat people the same way you want them to treat you”

III. Constancy of Love (v. 8-13)

Part of Paul's explanation of why this love is so important - it is going to be constant

Love never fails

- My misunderstanding because I saw it relating to v. 4-7.
- This does not mean I or you will not fail in showing love
- Love never ends; it is eternal; it is going to exist and endure forever
- v. 8-12: not done away (8, 10), never ceases (v.8 =CONSTANT/eternal). This contrasts to spiritual gifts that will end in this life and time. But love is going to continue and that is why Paul emphasizes it here.

Now let's detour into some theology beyond love:

Distinguish between "done away" and "cease"

Prophecy/knowledge (important in the church)

- "done away" - they will be replaced when perfect comes
- much debate of "perfect" - does that mean when Scripture is complete and we have canon?
- it is something else - when we are face to face with God
- Heaven based on v. 11-12: there going to be a transformation, a maturing of the individual person, there is an illumination, face to face understanding of who God is

Read **Revelation 22:1-5** - that is what is being described here when 'the perfect comes'

- **By contrast**, tongues will cease, automatically come to an end, not replaced

- What we teach at STBC: **Hebrews 2:3-4**. Tongues among the miracle gifts that confirm the authority and teaching of the apostles. Now we have the apostles teaching, so such gifts have ceased. No report of them in other early churches.

Cessationist / Non-cessationists - for further study see our “What We Teach” explanation.

Apply **8:1** example: Knowledge/Love to edify.

Great theology, but do not distract from the main point:

Love important because love never ends, even in heaven

IV. Conclusion (v. 13)

After my study, I listened to two sermons by Dr. Steve Lawson. He spent 2 hours teaching on this one verse. I only have a few minutes.

“But now” introduces the summary statement. Paul is emphasizing here - do not miss this verse. Listen up!

To show how important, Paul relies on the trio of the Christian life

- Faith, hope and love, trio used often by Paul in his letters
- **Colossians 1:4-5**: faith in Christ, hope toward heaven, love for each other.
- These marked the Colossian church, made Paul thankful
- These are the distinctives of the true Christian Church:
 1. Faith marks the church - tells us who is in the church
 2. Hope motivates the church - gets our eyes off our current circumstances and looking together toward heaven

3. Love maintains the church - it is how we stay unified as we who have faith look with hope toward heaven

I want to modify my answer about the distinctives of SanTan Bible Church.

1. Faith in the Jesus of the Bible (Word)
2. Hope in heaven that results in worship/obedience now; 1 Peter 1:13
3. Greatest of these must still be love - as we maintain the unity together

Why is love the greatest?

Dr. Steve Lawson gives four reasons:

- 1) Love is an attribute of God
- 2) Love fulfills the greatest commandment
 - i. The law in Old Testament and Jesus' summary of the law - love God and your neighbor
- 3) Love is the first fruit of the Spirit/salvation - Galatians 5:22
- 4) Love continues through eternity.

Challenge/Communion Preparation

Do you have this love for your church?

Or do you have a cold heart toward those around you, those inside the church, inside your family?

READ 1 John 4:7-11: Our ability to love results from God's love shown through the cross

Unbelievers: This is an invitation to know/experience that love by accepting Christ as Savior and Lord

Believers: This is a challenge to remember God's love as part of communion