

Love Is The Greatest and That's A Fact

“And now these three remain; faith, hope, and love. But the greatest of these is love.”

1 Corinthians 13:13

Topical Outline of the Chapter

- I. Love Is enriching: The Superiority of love, absolute necessity**
- II. Love edifies: The nature and character of love**
- III. The permanence of love**

I. Love is Enriching: The Superiority of Love, Absolute Necessity

Love, the Holy Spirit directed the Apostle to conclude is the most excellent way and it Heaven's way. As a matter of fact, Paul concludes chapter 12 “And now I will show you the most excellent way.” Paul was dealing with the Corinthian Church's problems when he wrote these words: the abuse of the gift of tongues, division in the Church, envy of others' gifts, selfishness, impatience with one another in public meetings, and behavior that was disgracing the Lord. Love have everything to do with the Church of Jesus Christ. The Corinthian Church had not only digressed but also regressed in their love-o-meter.

Without love even though I speak with human eloquence and angelic ecstasy it profits nothing. Without love I'm nothing but the creaking of a rusty gate. Without love I speak God's Word with no power, revealing all His mysteries and making everything plain as day, and if I have faith that says to a mountain, “Jump,” and it jumps but I don't love, the exercise is mute. And that's a fact! Paul doesn't mix words; we must have and exhibit love that comes from God.

When he mentions the five spiritual gifts: the gift of tongues, prophecy, knowledge, faith, and giving (sacrifices). He pointed out, that without love, the exercise of these gifts is nothing. Ministry without love cheapens both the minister and those who are touched by it; but ministry with love enriches the whole Church. This spiritual mark of love was desperately missing in the Corinthian Church and it infected the branches of hope and the root and trunk of faith.

In the twenty-first century, the Church is being challenged to witness to a world in agony and chaos in ways the first century Corinthian Church never imagined. The world needs the love only a loving Church can share. It is an absolute necessity. And that's a fact! It was Cornell West in his book "Race Matters," that he shared the word Nihilism (the spirit of meaningless, hopelessness, and lovelessness). Yes, lovelessness that has made its way into the Church of this day. It is the lack of love that has caused so many terror attacks and senseless killings. It was the lack of love that was prevalent in the Corinthian Church. And it is the lack of love and the spirit of hate that must be deactivated from the sacred halls of the Church. Love enriches while hate tears down. Love inspires while the spirit of hate causes distress.

Never before has the threat of annihilation and meaninglessness been so prevalent. From Newtown, CT to Aurora, CO and parts in between, people struggle to find faith in the presence of faithless dilemmas. As well, people struggle to find hope in the midst of seemingly hopeless situations. The search for faith and hope produces people, who are seeking a Church where others know their name and show them love. They are bruised and battered victims of a faith and hope promised but not realized. The result of this phenomenon is the existence of a universal yearning echoing around the world best expressed in an ancient biblical and existential question, "How long, O Lord, how long?" How long will the Church of the living God not show the world the love of Christ? We must stand up and let love lift us because nothing else can aid humankind like the love of the Trinity.

The Divine Architect had been secured and He was ready to go to work on the shaky foundation, cracks in the wall and linking roof of the Corinthian Church. The Holy Spirit's time had come and He was ready, willing and able to transform the Corinthian Church into the body of believers who would not digress or be stagnant but to progress in Heaven's agenda. In all you do, the Holy Spirit said, "do it in Love."

II. Love edifies: The Nature and Character of Love

Paul reminds believers that, "love cares more for others than for self." Love, truly is the mark of a Christian who strives to grow from milk to meat. It's great to have knowledge if it doesn't puff one up in pride. But it's greater to have love because love builds people up to grow in grace. The purpose of the spiritual gifts is the edification of the Church (1 Corinthians 12:17; 14:3,5,12,17,26). This means we must not think of ourselves, but of others; and this demands love. To have spiritual gifts and not have

love the “gift” falls on stony ground. Yet to have love, clothed in the spiritual gifts, God gives the increase.

The Corinthians needed to learn this vital lesson. Love was the missing ingredient. The Corinthians were impatient in the public meetings (1 Corinthians 14:29-32), but love would make them long-suffering. They were envying each other’s gifts, but love would remove that envy. They were “puffed up” with pride (1 Corinthians 4:6, 18-19, 5:2), but love would remove pride and self-vaunting and replace it with a desire to promote others. “Be kindly affectionate one to another with brotherly love, in honor preferring one another” Romans 12:10.

Some of the greatest insights on what it means to “love” someone come from the pen of the apostle Paul: “No matter what I say, what I believe, and what I do, I’m bankrupt without love. Love never gives up. Love cares more for others than for self. Love doesn’t want what it doesn’t have. Love doesn’t strut, doesn’t have a swelled head, doesn’t force itself on others, isn’t always me first, doesn’t fly off the handle, doesn’t keep score of sins of others, doesn’t revel when others grovel, takes pleasure in flowering of truth, puts up with anything, trusts God always, always looks for the best, never looks back, but keeps going to the end. Love never dies” (vv.3-8).

John had been married to Mary for fifty years. One night in bed she said, “When we were young you used to hold my hand.” A little irritated, he slowly reaches out his hand. “When we were young you used to snuggle up to me,” Mary said. Even more slowly, John’s body creaks and turns, nestling against hers. “When we were young you used to nibble on my ear,” she whispered. Abruptly he throws back the cover and jumps out of bed. Bewildered, Mary asks, “Where are you going?” “To get my teeth!” he grumbles. To nibble on an ear when you’re full of romance and bubbling hormones is one thing. To nibble on that same ear years later when it holds a hearing aid, when the scent in the air is Vicks Vapor Rub, and when you have to get up to get your teeth-that’s love!

Love does not rejoice in iniquity, yet the Corinthian’s were boasting about their sin in their Church (1 Corinthians 5). Love “shall cover the multitude of sins” (1 Peter 4:8). Like Noah’s sons, we should seek to hide the sins of other, and help them get right (Gen 9:20-23). Every negative implies a positive. He is anxious for them to follow the supreme way of life; the way that never fails; the way that in the end

leads straight to God's predestined goal; the way of love. The excellence of Love is a primary mark of a growing Christian.

Paul's method is not to define love-he never does-but to tell his readers how it works. Love need not be a noun in the life of a Christian, it must be a verb, acting on the behalf of heaven. Perhaps no one can define love unless it is seen in action; like every other universal spiritual value it can be defined only in terms of itself in the sphere and motion of action. There were difficult people in the Church at Corinth, and some are in the Churches we attend. But love was and is still required to be shown in action. Their uncouth and brusque ways were apt to hurt tender feelings and to put an almost intolerable strain on mutual relationships. Yet, love seeks to find a common ground and reasons to work together in Kingdom building.

It would have been so easy to retaliate in kind, or to nurse a grievance, or to become bitter. But none of these is the "more excellent way." Love always seeks to build up the power, purpose, productivity, and production in the Kingdom of God. Love disarms. Love fights against being distracted by the enemy. Love disables troublemakers. Love destroys the agenda of the devil. Yes, love provides the right equipment to fight the good fight. Love gives its Church members the ethics to stand in a dark world. Love motivates the right efforts of its members and love assists in the right execution of God's agenda. It is true that love edifies and aids all in its path. Love, God's love sent the Christ to the cross, made the Christ take the nails and crown of thorns. Why? So, the love of Christ would motivate you and I to come just as we are, where we are and who we are to take to the heavens. And that's a fact!

III. Love is Enduring- The Permanence of Love

The Bible says, "Love never fails." Think about it: money doesn't bring happiness, fame doesn't bring self-worth, and revenge doesn't bring satisfaction. The only thing that never fails is love. When Mother Teresa addressed world leaders at the United Nations, she was asked. "How can we have world peace?" She replied, "Go home and love your family." If we all did that, "Paradise Lost" would become "Paradise Found"!

Napoleon Bonaparte's intellectual greatness and intense egotism made his alleged tribute to the supremacy of leadership by love, all the more striking. He said, "Alexander, Caesar, Charlemagne founded great empires; but upon what did the creations of our genius depend? Upon force, Jesus alone

founded His empire upon love, and to the day millions would die for Him.” Sometimes leaders are just power-holders. Because you can’t love others without making yourself vulnerable, they see expressing love as weakness. But the fact is you can’t love and “keep all your options open.” To truly love whether it’s your spouse, your children, or the people you lead-you must give yourself unreservedly in such a way that you can be hurt and even rejected.

The fundamental principle on which power-holders operate is to protect themselves and everything they have. Whereas the fundamental principle of true leadership is to give of yourself with no holds barred. Love as an intrinsic characteristic of leadership seems out dated, yet according to Scripture it’s still the winning strategy. The Bible says, “God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind” (1 Timothy 1:7). That’s why love is the winning strategy. That’s why love is enduring.

Love never dies. Inspired speech will be over some day; praying in tongues will end; understanding will reach its limit. We know only a portion of the truth, and what we say about God is always incomplete. But when the Complete arrives, our incompletes will be canceled. When you are an infant at your mother’s breast, you gurgle and coo like any infant. When you grew up, you should leave those infant ways for good. We don’t yet see things clearly. We’re squinting in a fog, peering through a mist. But it won’t be long before the weather clears, and the sun shines bright! We’ll see it all then, see it all as clearly as God sees us, knowing Him directly just as he knows us! But for right now, until that completeness, we have three things to do to lead us toward that consummation. Trust steadily in God, hope unswervingly, love extravagantly. And the best of the three is love.

Prophecy, knowledge, and tongues were not permanent gifts. These gifts went together. God would impart knowledge to the prophet, and he would give the message in a tongue. Then an interpreter (sometimes the prophet himself) would explain the message. These were some gifts that some of the Corinthians prized, especially the gift of tongues. These gifts will fail (be abolished) and cease, but love will endure forever; for “God is love” (1 John 4:8,16). The Corinthians were like children playing with toys that would one day disappear. You expect a child to think, understand, and speak like a child, but you also expect the child to mature and start thinking and speaking like an adult. Their day comes when he must “put away childish things” (1 Corinthians 13:11).

William Law says, "Love has no errors, for all errors are the want for love." The Early Church showed that love conquers all. Jesus taught love. He lived love. He died love. But, early Easter Sunday morning, Love rose from the grave. Love showed that you couldn't hold it down. Love is not only the greatest of the Spirit; it is the only one that abides through eternity. And that's a fact.

Love superseded the gift because it outlasts them all. Long after these sought-after gifts are no longer necessary, love will still be governing principle that controls all that God and His redeemed people are and do. There is no alternative to love, and that's a fact. Love is not blind, but it leads to blindness. The opposite of love is hate. Hate destroys and tears down. Love builds up and sustains. It was hate that caused Cain to kill his brother. It was hate that caused evil men to crucify Jesus. Again, hate destroys and tears down, but love builds up and sustains.

Evelyn Brand felt called by God to go to India and she went. For a single woman in 1909, a calling like that required a truckload of faith. She married a young man named Jesse and together they began a ministry to the people in rural India, bring education and medical supplies, and building roads to reduce the isolation of the poor. For seven years they went without making a single convert to Christianity. But then a priest in a local tribal region developed a fever and grew deathly ill. No one else would go near him, but Evelyn and Jesse nursed him as he was dying. He said, "This God, Jesus, must be the true God because only Jesse and Evelyn will care for me in my dying." The priest gave his children to them to care for after he died-and that became a spiritual turning point in the part of the world. People began to examine the life and teachings of Jesus, and in increasing numbers began to follow Him. Evelyn and Jesse had thirteen years of productive service, then Jesse died. By this time Evelyn was fifty years old, and everyone expected her to return to her home in England. But she wouldn't do it. She was known and loved for miles around as "Granny Brand," and she stayed another twenty years under the mission board she had served so faithfully. Her son, Paul, came over to see her when she was seventy years old, and this is what he said about his mum: "This is how to grow old. Allow everything else to fall away until those around you see only love" (1 Corinthians 13:1-2).

Here's the rest of Evelyn Brand's story. At age seventy, she received word from her home mission office that they weren't to give her another five-year term. But she had Caleb's "we can certainly do it" attitude. A party was held to celebrate her time in India, and everyone there cheered her on. "Have a good trip back home," they all said. "I'll tell you a secret," she announced, "I'm not going back home.

I'm staying in India." Evelyn had a little shack built with some resources that she had smuggled in. Then she bought a pony to get around the mountains, and this septuagenarian would ride from village to village on horseback to tell people about Jesus. She did that for five years on her own. One day, at seventy-five years old, she fell and broke her hip. Her son, Paul Brand, the eminent doctor, said to her, "Mum, you had a great run. God's used you. It's time to turn it over now. You can go home." She replied, "I am not going back home." She spent another eighteen years traveling from one village to another on horseback. Falls, concussions, sicknesses, and aging could not stop her. Finally, when she hit ninety-three years old, she could not ride horseback any more. So, the men in these villages- because they love Granny Brand so much put her on a stretcher and carried her from one village to another. She lived two more years and gave those years as a gift, carried on a stretcher, to help the poorest of the poor. She died, but she never retired. She just graduated.