

09/05/10

Practicing Biblical Love -- 1 Corinthians 13:1-13

- True/False – God’s Word emphasizes that Christians should be known for their love for others, and should be growing in that love...no question about that one...but then, how about this...
- True/False -- The world in which we live is sometimes confused about the topic of love.
 - that one’s true as well, isn’t it...how about this one?...
- True/False – Followers of Christ like you and me are sometimes impacted by the world’s ideas in ways that lead us away from what God has commanded us to be, and to do...that’s three true ones in a row, for sure...

- Introduction

- let’s break them down...does God’s Word really place significant emphasis on the topic of love?...is this a major issue for those of us who say we know Him?...

1. What Scripture says about love.

- **Hebrews 10:24** - ...let us consider how to stimulate one another to love...
 - **1 Corinthians 14:1** - Pursue love...
 - **1 Thessalonians 3:12** - May the Lord cause you to increase and abound in love...
 - **2 Corinthians 8:8** - ...I want to test the sincerity of your love...
 - **Philippians 2:2** ...maintaining the same love...
 - **1 Peter 4:8** - Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins.
 - **Colossians 3:14** - Beyond all these things *put on* love, which is the perfect bond of unity.
 - **Romans 13:8-10** - Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled *the* law. For this, “YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY, YOU SHALL NOT MURDER, YOU SHALL NOT STEAL, YOU SHALL NOT COVET,” and if there is any other commandment, it is summed up in this saying, “YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.” Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of *the* law.
 - **Matthew 22:37-40** - And He said to him, “ ‘YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.’ “This is the great and foremost commandment. “The second is like it, ‘YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.’ “On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets.”
 - **John 13:34-35** - “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. “By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”
- now, that’s just a quick survey – there are so many other passages we could add to that...
 - but surely that’s enough to convince all of us that there ought to be a special place in the heart and mind of every Christian for the subject of love...
 - there ought to be an intense interest in, and desire to be growing in this area...because the Lord certainly emphasizes this in many ways in His Word...

- what about the second question?...is our world sometimes confused about this topic?...everywhere you turn, huh?...what are some of this messages?

2. What the world says about love.

a. Finding lasting love is hopeless.

- one magazine article I read posed the question – “What starts love and what stops love?”
- one woman sarcastically said, **“What starts love is, meeting a man. What stops love is, meeting a man.”**
- Another writer said – **“There are many who believe we would be far better off replacing Saint Valentine with Saint Jude, the patron saint of hopeless causes.”**

b. Love is a reservoir of feelings that will probably dry up.

- another article I read was entitled **“Why Love Was Not Built to Last”**
- the writer spoke of a person who stopped loving her husband after he had failed her in some way...she said – **“Ten years of loving that man and all of a sudden it’s gone. I don’t understand.”**
- then the author said, **“The explanation? Susie has experienced what I’ve come to recognize in my two decades of psychotherapeutic work with couples in distress: that love is very much a reservoir, and over time there may be additions to it or outflow. People in love rarely seem to know how close to empty this reservoir may be...while most of us can vividly recall each step along the road to falling in love, the process of falling out of love is largely invisible until completed.”**
- so there it is – love is a reservoir of feelings that was never intended to last...
- thank the Lord, by the way, for the many men and women of our church who in a number of cases this summer will be celebrating 10th anniversaries, 20th, 30th, 40th and so on...

c. Love is an absence of problems.

- another writer said, **“Healthy love is when you find someone whom you like, admire, and respect...Love stops when you discover things about him that you don’t respect. He’s not kind, or has attributes you can’t stand: horrible manners, no tact, etc. You realize you can’t have the relationship you envisioned with this person.”**
- there may be some truth about that as you’re getting to know someone in a dating relationship—but what about those who think that’s true if they’re married?...
- a well known divorce attorney, **Marvin Mitchelson**, wrote a book entitled **“Made in Heaven, Settled in Court”**...
 - **“What starts love is looking through rose-colored glasses. You idealize your future with this person, you put your best foot forward. Then real living sets in. Romance takes a back seat to bills, job aggravations, family problems. You focus on this things instead of cultivating the relationship.”**
 - does it really have to be one or the other?...can’t you focus on problems and get them solved even while you’re growing in love?...

d. Love is a relationship that makes you feel better.

- Terry Burman, president of Barry’s Jewelers, **“Love starts when someone makes you feel worthwhile—and an important gift can be part of that. I like to watch couples in the showroom, looking at rings. They get closer together. There’s a dreamy look of contentment. The end comes when you are no longer made to feel valued and validated by the other person. I wish all relationships were as long-lasting as diamonds.”**

e. Love is finding someone who can help you explore deeper aspects of yourself.

- JZ Knight – When does love end? I don't think it ever does, if it's been established as a reflection of the individual's self-love. What ends is not the love but the way it serves us. When we stop growing in one relationship, we're ready for another, one that will allow us to explore other, deeper aspects of ourselves."

- now, we could keep this up for a long time...but I think that's enough to make the point...we live in a world that is very confused when it comes to this subject...
- but I hope we would also be honest enough to acknowledge this...the mentalities of our world have a way of impacting us as we don't zealously guard our hearts and minds and bring every thought in captivity to Christ...
- that's why this morning we want to talk about **Practicing Biblical Love...**
- with that in mind, please open your Bible to 1 Corinthians chapter 13...page 137 of the back section of the Bible under the chair in front of you...

- now I realize that some of you might say – I thought we were studying the topic of spiritual gifts...and you would be right about that...
- we're doing a series this year entitled Taking the Next Step...with Joy.
 - this is a verse by verse study of the book of 1 Corinthians...
 - and we've said the last couple of weeks that 1 Corinthians 12, 13, and 14 are all about the subject of spiritual gifts...
 - the challenge is that if you just look at the first 7 verses of chapter 13, you might not draw that connection at all...
 - this is known as the great love chapter in the Bible...
 - in fact last weekend, I had the privilege of performing my nephew's wedding, and it was on August 28th (8/28)...
 - so I organized the wedding around Romans 8:28...and we know that all things work together for good...
 - and the bride's father came up to me afterward and said something like – I appreciated the way you brought that particular verse into the ceremony...because you just expect the message to be on 1 Corinthians 13...
 - and he's right – it's the love chapter...and there is nothing wrong with thinking carefully about what the verses tell us about that topic...
 - but please keep in mind – we always study the Word of God in its context...these great principles about love are embedded in a context where Paul is speaking about people in the church and the way they use their spiritual gifts...or in this misuse, or don't use their spiritual gifts...
 - let's see how those themes are woven together in this great passage...read 1 Cor. 13:1-13...

- so we're talking about Practicing Biblical Love...and with the time we have remaining, let's look for **3 steps necessary to grow God's kind of love.**

I. Understand Love's Definition.

- one of the obvious lessons that flows out of the illustrations from the world we read earlier was the significantly different definitions you could use for love...
- well, there is no way we can grow in something unless we understand what it is we're actually talking about...there were three different words used for love in Bible times

A. Range of Greek words.

1. Eros.

- we of course get our word erotic from that word...
- it would be alluding to romantic or sexual love...
- this particular word is never used in Scripture...

- now that doesn't mean that God is embarrassed by the concept...back in chapter 7 we studied the topic of human sexuality very thoroughly, and we saw that sexual relations within the boundaries of monogamous marriage is to be honored, and celebrated, and practiced by both husband and wife in ways that are wholehearted, and passionate, and aggressive...
- God created erotic love and when it is practiced properly, and biblically and for His glory, it can be a beautiful thing...but, that's not what's in focus in this text...

2. Philew.

- you might consider that friendship love, or brotherly love
- earlier this week I was in Philadelphia...that city's name comes from this word...the city of brotherly love...some of the people in the traffic jam I was in on the way to the airport apparently did not know the meaning of the Greek word for which their city had been named...
- but this too is a beautiful thing...and it is celebrated many times in Scripture as a way people should relate to one another
- that also is not what is in focus here...

3. Agape.

- this was the rarest word in the Greek language for love but by far the one that is used most regularly in Scripture...
- here's one way to define it – **“A choice of the will to sacrifice oneself to meet the needs of the other person for the glory of God.”**
- each facet of that definition is important...
 - biblical love is a choice of the will...it's not a feeling first...
 - when a married person says, I don't love her anymore, that's not simply a report on the status of one's feelings...it's an induction of sinfulness...
 - that person is saying – I am no longer going to exercise my will in a sacrificial way toward that person...
 - now, are there feelings involved?...absolutely...God made that part of us too, to be celebrated, and embraced, and expressed...
 - but that is not the basis of love, or the primary indicator of its existence...
 - we acknowledge our feelings, and we enjoy them when we should...but we don't live by them...
 - they're the caboose at the end of the train...God gives us the ability to think and choose wisely regardless of how we feel on a given day...
- our feelings are up and down and all over the place...and the other people in our lives will sometimes disappoint us...but we can still practice biblical love...we can still choose to sacrifice ourselves to meet the needs of others for the glory of God...

B. God is our model and example.

- **John 3:16 - For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.**
- **Ephesians 5:25 - Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her,**
- verses like these help us understand the sacrificial aspect of the definition...For God so loved the world that He gave...Christ loved the church and gave Himself...

- now, let me just ask you to pause and open the dictionary of your mind and check your definition of love...is it possible that you have been operating with a definition of love derived from a source other than the Word of God?...
- and would the people around you characterize you as a loving person?...
- and could it be that some of us should say – I need to change my definition to bring it in line with Scripture...and I need to find ways to sacrifice and meet the needs of those the Lord has called me to love...

II. Make Love a Priority.

- that's Paul's point in verses 1-3...

A. Without it, you are nothing.

1. Even for those who possessed the gifts of tongues.

- **1 Corinthians 13:1 - If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.**
- we'll talk more about this in subsequent weeks, but the gift of tongues in the Bible was always a known language of some kind...the miracle was that a person would speak in a particular way and the recipients would hear the message in their own language even though the speaker did not know that language...
- it was like when I was in Brazil a few weeks ago...if I had the gift of tongues, I would not have needed Sacha to translate for me...
- and one of the unfortunate reasons for that was that God was pronouncing judgment on his own people the Jews because of their unbelief...and the Word was going out in other languages as other people groups were being grafted into the church...
- that why Paul would eventually say – I don't want the gift of tongues to die out although I know it will, because that will be a sign that the judgment of God's people will be complete in this age...
- but the point here is – even when that gift was operative in the church, if it was exercised in a way that sought attention for oneself...it might be showy, but it wasn't meaningful...it was a noisy gong, or clanging cymbal...Paul says, you have become nothing...
- there are all sorts of people who have all sorts of gifts...but because of a lack of love for others, they either don't exercise their gifts in the church or they do so in a self-centered, showy fashion in a way that cancels out any benefit to themselves or others...they have become a noisy gong...

2. Even for those who possessed the gift of prophecy or knowledge.

- **1 Corinthians 13:2 - If I have *the gift of prophecy*, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing.**
- verse 8 also made it clear that those gifts would die out...
- but it is the same as tongues...even when they were needed in the church prior to the completion of the Scripture...exercising that gift in an unloving way cancels out the benefit of the gift...

3. Even for those who possess the gift of giving.

- **1 Corinthians 13:3 - And if I give all my possessions to feed *the poor*, and if I surrender my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing.**
- some people give but they want something in return...
- they want their name on the side of a building...they want attention or prestige...
- no, giving should be done out a heart of love...

- now, let's plow this the other way...

B. Results in the life of a person who makes love a priority.

1. You will be able to name clear, specific examples of sacrifice for others for the glory of God.

- there are literally hundreds and hundreds of people who have served Christ in some way in this church this week...
- and they did it sacrificially...
- it wasn't always convenient...it wasn't always easy...and they weren't for praise or applause...
- in many cases, there weren't any immediate results...in fact, they may have sacrificially served and the reward they received was criticism or complaint...
- but none of that matters...because the motivation of the heart was love...
- is that true for you?...

2. You will be a more spiritual person.

- what we're talking about this morning is hard...
- but let's never forget that we have the Holy Spirit to help us use these gifts and abilities well...
- **Galatians 5:22-23 - But the fruit of the Spirit is love...**
- **Ephesians 5:18 - And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit...**
- have you ever tried to exercise a gift of the Spirit apart from the fruit of the Spirit?...
- let's take the gift of serving...
 - let's say that you're serving in some way in your home...
 - but you're really not doing it lovingly...
 - you're not doing it out of a genuine desire to meet someone else's need to glorify the Lord...
 - well, what's eventually going to happen?...you're going to be mad that people aren't serving like you are...pretty soon you're stomping around, and fuming...
 - what's wrong with that?...exercising gifts apart from the context of love...makes you sound like a really noisy gong...
 - but on the other hand, if you are crying out to the Spirit for help and enablement...not only are you becoming more loving, you're becoming more spiritual...

3. It can always be growing.

- the beauty of spiritual fruit is that it can always be growing...
- [develop – the fruit in Brazil...**[pic of the fruit table]**
- [apply to the way folks serve and use their gifts in our church]...
- [develop – what evidence is there that growing in biblical love is a priority for you?]

- now, what's the third piece of this puzzle?...

III. Put on Love's Characteristics.

- of course our time doesn't allow us to study each of these in the detail we might want to this morning...
- but I'd like to make 2 general observations and then we'll try to organize this material into a few summary categories...
- 1. there are 15 different characteristics here – 7 are stated positively (love is...) while 8 are stated negatively (love is not...)...we need to think about this from both perspectives...
- 2. In the original language, each of these characteristics is a verb...now, in the Greek language, verbs can be used nominatively—so I'm not saying they're mis-translated, of course...
 - but that just underscores the fact that in the Bible, love is not something you feel, it's something you do...
 - now, if all morning, you've been wondering, but how can I really evaluate whether I am growing in love the way God desires...let's organize these 15 words around 3 headings...

A. Loving people have the right view of themselves.

1. Don't brag – v. 4

2. Aren't arrogant – v. 4

3. Aren't rude – v. 5

4. Don't seek their own – v. 5

- now, how does that fit into our overall definition?...
- they are various forms of selfishness...
- there's a sense in which the opposite of biblical love is not hate...it's selfishness...
- and when you choose not to be like that, you are choosing to be like Christ...
- Philippians 2:5-8 - Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, *and* being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

B. Loving people have the right view of truth.

1. Don't rejoice in iniquity – v. 6

2. Rejoices in the truth – v. 6

- it takes massive doses of the truth of the Word of God to overcome all the world has to say on this subject...
- that's why we began with a list of verses from Scripture about love, and then juxtaposed that to various illustrations from what the world says...
- well, we're called upon to live in that world every day – and the only way we are going to have a different view of love is if we rejoice in what God's Word says about the subject and let that be our guide...

C. Loving people have the right view of others.

1. Kind – v. 4

- would that word describe you?...

2. Does not envy – v. 4

- takes 2 forms – I want what somebody else has, I wish they didn't have what they have...
- **Proverbs 27:4 - Wrath *is* cruel, and anger *is* outrageous; but who *is* able to stand before envy?**

3. Patient – v. 4

- [if time – develop – macrothumew)

4. Gives the benefit of the doubt – v. 7 (believes, hopes, endures all things)

5. Forgiving – v. 5, 7 (does not take into account a wrong suffered, bears all things)

- encourage folks to review that list, and rank themselves on a scale of 1-10 for each characteristic, and then ask someone else to do it on your behalf...