

Midweek Message

“So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.”

(1 Corinthians 13:13 ESV)

This past Sunday, as we're continuing through our study of the Sermon on the Mount, we came to the part where Jesus tells us that not only are we to love our neighbors we're also to love our enemies. As we looked at the passage, we learned that anyone and everyone is to be loved in very practical ways regardless of who they are or what they've done or even haven't done. As Jesus indicated, we're not to pick and chose those to whom we express love but that we're to treat all with dignity and provide for their needs as we have opportunity.

One of the most profound passage of Scripture on this subject of love for one another is found in the Apostle Paul's letter to the Corinthians. In chapter 13, a chapter that is well-known and well-loved by believers, he reveals many characteristics of what this love, of which God calls us to express, what we might call Biblical Love, should and should not look like. And so, what I'd like to do in this message is briefly summarize how we can go about loving others as we know God has commanded us to do.

First, biblical love begins through an attitude we embrace. One of the problems that surfaced in the Corinthian church was the desire for the glamorous, more charismatic spiritual gifts. Each person wanted to be in the forefront, to be admired, or even praised as one who was the greatest, the best in the church, and they were only concerned with their own prestige. However, the Apostle Paul, in the last verse of chapter 12 says NO! that there's a greater gift to desire, a better way to express all the gifts as he tells them and us: *“But earnestly desire the higher gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way.”* (1 Corinthians 12:31 ESV). Basically he's telling us there really is only one way to live, one way to share God's grace with others and that's the way of biblical love. You see, how we live, how we chose to express our gifts, is a decision that begins in the mind, in our thoughts, with a proper attitude toward the Christian way of life that will influence the way we live. Listen, everything we do and say will be based on the attitude we choose to have, that is, the way in which we think about ourselves and even more so how we think about others. If you think poorly of others, or you think that others aren't worthy of your love and affection, or you seek only to enrich yourself, or exalt yourself, and you're only focused on yourself, then you can be pretty well assured that you won't care about anyone else and you won't express love in any way, shape, or form. The Apostle Paul tells us the importance of the mind when he writes these words:

“I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.” (Romans 12:1, 2 ESV).

The way in which we carry out the will of God for our lives is through the renewing of our minds. We overcome the system found in the world, the system of a fallen human race, by coming to the Word of God, drinking it in deeply, letting it do its work of grace by the power of the Holy Spirit in us, and then setting our minds on doing what's right. You see, the point is that biblical love begins in our minds, our attitudes, what we believe regarding how love plays out in our lives. If we don't choose to love others we won't, we'll only love ourselves, doing everything for our own benefit, to fulfill our selfish ambitions. However, as God's grace works in us through His Word, we begin to be transformed from looking inward to ourselves and looking outward toward those around us.

Second, biblical Love is affection we exhibit. We can see this as the Apostle Paul continues his discourse on love:

“If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.” (1 Corinthians 13:1-3 ESV).

Did you notice, that in all of that, there seems to be a genuine concern being expressed, that regardless of what we happen to be doing, love must be the foundation, the motivation for it all? You see, unless there's a genuine concern for others in what we do it doesn't matter what we do as it won't be done in love, it won't flow from a genuine concern for those who are the recipients of our actions. The Apostle Peter tells us:

“Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace.” (1 Peter 4:8-10 ESV).

Did you notice how he says that we're to love one another “deeply from the heart”, meaning this is more than just actions but also affections. Now, I know that it's hard to feel like loving others especially those with whom we may differ or those who have hurt us. And yet, as we learned this past Sunday, that's exactly what Jesus calls us to do. One of the things I've found out in my life as I've struggled with this issue is that if I choose to have an attitude of love for others, regardless of how they've treated me and especially when I don't feel like it, doing what's necessary for their well-being, as I remember I'm serving the Lord, then often what happens is that the feelings of love, the affection I'm to have, begins to grow within me and it often becomes little bit easier.

Finally, biblical love is an action we express. This is where we reach the manner in which this love is to be experienced by those around us. The Apostle Paul explains this when he writes:

“Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends.” (1 Corinthians 13:4-8a ESV)

You see ... when it comes to the practical aspects of biblical love we're to refrain from doing harmful things and instead, we're to do helpful things. That makes sense, doesn't it? As the Apostle Paul writes elsewhere: *“Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.” (Romans 13:10 ESV).* Love is all about expression, how others around us experience biblical love from us. We can't love others from afar, at least not in the fulness of love. We might have nice feelings about them, it may be easier to think nice thoughts about them, but love has to be expressed in a real way for its fulness to be experienced.

In his letter to the Ephesians, the Apostle Paul writes: *“Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.” (Ephesians 5:1,2 ESV).* Biblical love is an action that's expressed with an affection that's prompted by an attitude to love and love never fails.

Pastor Mark