

Sermon Title: Living A Life of Love

Sermon by Pastor Tom Harrington

Week of January 30, 2011

Sermon Based Small Group Discussion Guide

Big Idea: God measure spiritual maturity by our ability to love.

Icebreaker

Sermon Text:

1 Corinthians 13:1-13

1If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. 2If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. 3If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.

4Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. 5It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. 6Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. 7It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

8Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. 9For we know in part and we prophesy in part, 10but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears. 11When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me. 12Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. 13And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

This week our study is one of the most famous chapters of the Bible: 1 Corinthians 13. Let's see what we can learn about love! The whole Bible is summed up by the one word, "love" (see Leviticus 19:17-18; Matthew 19:19). Love sums up the Christian's responsibilities in the New Testament (Romans 13:9). Love is the capstone, the crowning virtue, the consummation of all other virtues (Galatians 5:22-23; 2 Peter 1:5-7; Colossians 3:12-14). Love is the goal of Paul's instruction (1 Timothy 1:5). Love is the distinguishing mark of the true Christian (John 13:35). Without love, the value of spiritual gifts

is greatly diminished (1 Corinthians 12:1-3). Love is greater than any of the spiritual gifts and is even greater than faith and hope (1 Corinthians 13:13). Love endures suffering under persecution, and Christians will be persecuted (Matthew 24:10; 2 Timothy 3:12).

Love is easily lost, without one's even being aware of it (Revelation 2:1-7). Love is misunderstood and distorted by the unbelieving world. Confusions between sex and love. Love is vitally important to Christians, for it should govern our relationships with other Christians, especially those with whom we strongly disagree. Surely our faith should impact the manner in which we relate to one another in the church and in the home. Christians by the thousands have settled for relationships where they co-exist more as business partners than as husband and wife. Add to that number all those parents and children that are constantly at odds with each other. Somehow, we as a society have begun to believe Tina Turner's tragic commentary that "love is just a second-hand emotion."

In this verse, Paul indicates that true spiritual maturity can be measured by the quality of our relationships rather than our giftedness. The apostle challenges us to apply our faith to our relationships.

1. Why is someone who "speak[s] in the tongues of men and of angels" but who is without love like a "resounding gong or a clanging cymbal?" Reflect on the cheapness of words not backed up by loving conduct.

2. What do each of verses 1-3 say about motivation? What are some false motivations that could lead a person to take the actions described in verse 3? How can we tell whether our motivation is really love?

3. Take the statements of verses 4 through 7. How does my idea of what it means to love and to be loved compare with the description of love in this passage? How is it possible for me to love others in this way (cf. Galatians 5:22-25)? Do you get irritated when waiting in line at the store? How did you

react if you were running behind on your way to church and get behind a slow driver?

Love is:

Patient

Kind

Forgets being wronged Jealous

Rejoices in the truth

Never gives up, endures

Never loses faith

Always hopeful

Love is not:

Boastful

Proud

Rude

Irritable

Self-seeking

Rejoices in injustice

Gives up, does not endure

Loses faith

Selfish, expects something in return

4. Relationships require love. Nelson and Virginia Bell were the parents of Ruth Graham, wife of evangelist Billy Graham. "The Bells had a beautiful and lengthy marriage. When they got older, Dr. Bell had to care for his wife. One day Ruth Graham entered her parents' home and found her father on his hands and knees putting stockings on Mrs. Bell. Dr. Bell looked up at his daughter and said, 'You know, the greatest privilege of my life is taking care of your mother.'" (Raymond McHenry, "Something to Think About," Peabody, MA, Hendrickson Publishers, 1998, p.157.)

Who has come the closest to living out verses 4 – 8 toward you personally? What factor(s) enabled that person to demonstrate such love for you? What changes do you need to experience to demonstrate this kind of love for others?

5. What is taught about spiritual gifts and eternity in verses 8-10?

6. On the basis of verse 11 and your own experience, what role does maturity have in one's ability to love? Describe how mature love differs from childish love.

7. What does verse 12 teach you about Christian hope? (Hebrews 11:1) What are some things you "see in a mirror dimly" now that you someday hope to see more clearly?

Taking it Home

During your devotional time this week with the Lord reflect on the following.

1. Based on the characteristic of biblical love. Think of a random act of kindness you can perform.
2. Reread 1 Corinthians 13: 4-8 and replace the word love (and its pronouns) with your name.
3. Consider any past hurts that you need God's help in healing in order to share God's Love more fully?
4. What would happen to a church or even your small group if love became our distinctive quality?

Prayer Requests and Praises:

1. Whenever you read or listen to Scripture, prayerfully invite the Holy Spirit to reveal God's truth to you.
2. How can the group pray for you and/or the need you identified during this Bible study?