

Today one of the best known and most powerful Bible passages:

Paul's words to the church in Corinth

The Gift of Love

13 If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. **2** 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 do not have love, I am nothing.

3 If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

4 Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant **5** or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; **6** it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth.

7 It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

8 Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end. **9** For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part; **10** but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end. **11** When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways. **12** For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. **13** And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.

At his retirement, a college professor was asked what he considered the most important contribution of his career.

"I have spent my career like a police officer trying to control traffic. But instead of trying to avoid collisions... **I have been trying to arrange them.** I have considered it my calling to arrange collisions between the minds of young people and the great truths of our human existence."

Paul was trying to impose a similar collision between the anxious, fractious members of the Corinthian church and the truth of the Gospel. Their concern over proper beliefs and the distribution of spiritual gifts had left them weary. In the previous chapter Paul used the famous analogy of a human body ...

2 For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ

And if the ear would say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. ¹⁷ If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be?

Paul was trying to get the Corinthians to see things from the proper perspective. But now Paul hastens to add the single most important component necessary for that spiritually- gifted body: **CHRIST the lifeblood of love.**

Just as the individual organs of the body cannot function without the blood coursing through them, we humans are nothing without love flowing through us.

The organs are all present to aid the blood - the heart to pump it, the kidneys and liver to cleanse it, the lungs to oxygenate it - and the blood in turn nourishes the organs of the body.

We can survive without some organs. People survive every day with only one kidney, no spleen or gall bladder at all, or without entire lobes of the liver. Even a severely damaged heart valve or muscle can be coped with by the body.

But when something goes wrong with our blood, we are in big trouble.

So it is for Paul and love. Without love we are nothing. (With apologies to Sheri & Anthony, both talented percussionist.)...Paul refers to life without love as

“a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal”

The theologian, Emil Brunner insists that the relationship between faith in God and a life fueled by love is quite simple,

“...faith is the hand by which we receive love, the way in which we receive God's revelation.”

In other words, **“...faith is nothing in itself but the openness of our heart to God's love”.**

For Christians, love is made manifest in our human hearts by Christ's living presence there. Our faith, therefore, becomes our response to the vital, present reality of Christ living in us.

It gives us perspective -

- 1) on how to view life's triumphs and tragedies;
- 2) it gives us patience - to endure the bad and accept the good graciously;
- 3) It gives purpose - providing us with a reason to want to surmount the setbacks and look for celebrations;
- 4) It gives us passion - to living life through all its blessings and hardships
- 5) It gives us the meaning of life! Love. To love. To be loved.
- 6) It gives us the key to understand, trust and follow God in Christ.

In the Hebrew Scriptures, faith finds God constantly showing "steadfast love."

In the New Testament, God is love and those who dwell in love, dwell in God.

So, Paul's affirmation that "faith, hope, love abide: but the greatest of these is love." Is the meaning of life and the whole Gospel promise.

Familiar words, recited at so many weddings...YET ...it is so much more than an empty cliché, so much more than what I call "Hallmark card theology".

It demands a completely Spirit filled attitude towards life.

One of the great principles of Reformed teaching on understanding scripture is:

"Let all interpretations be in accord with the rule of love, the two-fold commandment to love God and to love our neighbor"

We are to live a life of love. We are to think love, act love, do love, be love.

What does that mean?

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A Southern Baptist educator writes of doing a teaching tour of many States on the theme of “We are all made in God’s image”.

She reflects that almost every night she spilt tears in the privacy of her hotel room because at every venue, someone would argue that “we can’t all be made in God’s image!”. Some , based on her gender and ethnicity, even challenged her authority to teach at all!

I see no love!

Compare that with a Jewish World War 2 concentration camp survivor who writes about having his faith tested and asking “Where is God? Does God exist? Why does God not act?”.

Surrounded by evil in all its possible forms his questions were valid and real.

He wrestled with his faith and considered for a time that perhaps the world was evil, and that destruction was inevitable.

But he rejected that and faced each day of unimaginable horror convinced that “God was steadfast in love” and that love would destroy evil, and that though he could see no further than the extermination building, he still believed in the God of love! That the world and life were love and that love would win, even if he did not live to witness it.

I see love!

Love must be the foundation upon which we build our lives.

Love must never be forgotten.

Love is to be the life source of all we do.

Love must be so much more than sentimentality.

Love must transform us from the inside out.

Love is the God given key to salvation.

Love heals, builds up and nurtures.

“faith, hope, love abide: but the greatest of these is love.”

Amen.