

THE TRUTH ABOUT LOVE

1 Corinthians 13:1-13

September 7, 2003

Bethany Church

Wesley J. Gabel

This summer I had the privilege of leading my sister and her husband in vows of marriage while we stood in a park in Indianapolis. The experience was bittersweet. This was a second marriage for both her husband and her. Right before the wedding began, I overheard her little nephew ask, why did you and Uncle get divorced? I remembered the painful mess that had unfolded nearly a decade earlier, and I wondered what my sister would say. You understand what I mean when I say bittersweet? It was a joy to be involved; but the occasion also carried sadness and irony. I was so glad that God gave me a word for her husband and her. After I read from the scriptures and began speaking, I realized this word was not merely for them. It is for us.

It is so wonderful to witness love in action through the covenant of marriage; and it is so sad to see it all dissolve in a divorce. That is so confusing. It makes little ones like that nephew and old ones like us wonder about the nature of love. Some people define love as a feeling. “Love is the feeling that you feel when you feel like you never felt this feeling before,” they claim. They treat love as a state of bliss that you fall into. They say, “We fell in love.” They equate love to a chemistry that allows you to perpetuate this good feeling. Thus, they search for compatibility and a special spark of attraction. *Sleepless in Seattle* and countless other movies promote such notions. This understanding may come from the belief that humanity has evolved

and thus true love is a matter of chance, not choice. However, love is neither so fickle nor elusive. It is a fruit of creation. It comes from above. God, our designer and father, reveals that he is defined by love; and he desires to clear up our confusion and show us the truth about love.

First, God wants you and me to know love's importance. Without love your spirituality amounts to nothing.

If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. (1 Corinthians 13:1, NIV)

Spirituality without love is distraction. It doesn't matter what gifts you have and what passion you develop. Without love, you are a problem.

Without love, your knowledge and achievements are futile.

If 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. (1 Corinthians 13:2, NIV)

Earlier Paul wrote the Corinthians believers:

Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. (1 Corinthians 8:1, NIV)

What lasting pleasure comes from a monumental feat if no one is helped? So what if you scored higher on a test? So what if you got a promotion? So what if you made more money? So what if you acquired some fame? So what? Who was built up? Who was touched forever? Your achievements count for nothing unless through love they build and bless others.

Without love your sacrifice is meaningless:

If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing. (1 Corinthians 13:3, NIV)

No matter how just or noble the cause, no matter how great the sacrifice, you've gained nothing for yourself or humanity without love.

If love is this important, then what is it? How is it defined? Understand that love is something divine. The Apostle John wrote:

Anyone who does not love does not know God — for God is love. (1 John 4:8, NLT)

John went on to share how God showed his real love to us by first, sending Jesus to us and by second, sacrificing Jesus for us. The standard of love is God. The model of love is God. The author of love is God. We were made in the image of God. We were made in the image of love, to mirror God in his love. Cut off from his love, separated from God by sin, we can't do it. We can't mirror his love. We can't because we don't know what it is, and we do not have the ability to produce it. In order for us to love, we first must embrace divine love. Once again John wrote:

We love because he first loved us. (1 John 4:19, NIV)

Honestly, love is a response. Pure love is a response to God's love for us. Any other love is tainted, even poisoned. It becomes self-serving and erratic. And, if it is self-serving or erratic, can you say truthfully that it is love? We settle for cheap imitations. You remember the TV commercials where the question is posed whether it is butter or margarine? Butter may have the imitation of margarine, but love has no close approximation. It has no imitation. Nothing can fulfill its purpose. It is real and means everything, or it is false and does nothing.

Now, every one of us has tasted poisoned love. We've witnessed love that degraded into selfishness and became erratic. That love didn't build us. It actually sewed distrust. It lifted us and then let us down. Yet many of us have tasted a bit of divine love coursing through the choices and actions of family or friends.

When God's attitudes and actions are followed, mimicked, or imitated, people are built up in love. So how do we sort out what is love and what falls short? God revealed through Paul's writing what love is, what it is not, what it does and what it doesn't do.

Love is patient and kind. When you see patience and kindness, you see the hand and heart of God. However, Paul spent even more time talking about what love is not. He wanted us to not be fooled. Love is not jealous, boastful, proud, or rude. It doesn't demand its way, it's not quick-tempered, it doesn't keep records of wrongs, or celebrate injustice. When you hear, "Serves you right," or "Now, you know how I feel," that is not love. That is not the voice of love or the voice of God. Whoever acts that way is not walking with God. God's Spirit is not leading them. In contrast, love celebrates truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes and always perseveres. That is love, and that is God.

To truly love, we must realize the cheap imitations that masquerade as love. When we see them in our lives, confess the falsehood or brokenness. That imitation of love silences God's Spirit, hurts God's heart and nailed Christ to the cross. It is wicked deception. When we reject this poisonous imitation and turn to the forgiveness of Christ, we implement God's love by embracing real love. In patience and kindness, God sacrificed to clear you of guilt. Let him inspire you to receive forgiveness and release people in forgiveness. Let his love reshape your perspective and practices.

Have you been violated and wounded? Then let him remake you in love. Recognize that this generally requires the priesthood of other believers. God reaches out to heal you through the faith and actions of believers. That truth is emphasized throughout the entire Bible. People who refused the ministry of Moses, Samuel, David and Elijah refused God. People who refused the ministry of Jesus rejected their Father who sent Jesus to them. People who refused Jesus' disciples rejected Jesus who sent them. Are we refusing to receive the love and grace from the people Jesus has sent to us?

What's the truth about love? You must receive it to share it. Have you?