

Sermon

Grace Street Fellowship, Jim Burgin, pastor

Sunday, August 26, 2018

1 Corinthians 13 - Back to the Basics

OPENING

Love Gone Wrong – Breaking News that Ben Affleck & Jennifer Garner have reached a divorce settlement. Lyndsey Shookus is the model Ben dated while married to Garner. There is another article in the paper today sharing with all of us what Shookus looks for in a marriage. I'm sure that's quite the read. You think she might check to see if her boyfriend has a wedding ring.

I'm really not making fun of the people in the news, as much as I wonder why some things are considered news, but also to point out what passes as "love" in our modern day.

WHY THE FOCUS ON LOVE TODAY?

1. Because Love is the defining mark of Christianity
 - a. Not faith in Christ?
 - b. By this will all men know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." John 13:34.
 - c. I John 4:7 - Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God.

2. Because Love is the most understood word in the English language
 - a. In popular culture: We have puppy love/true love. Here's an illustration from the classic country artist, Don Williams. Williams defines love as an adjective that describes how I feel.

First I get cold, then hot
Think I'm on fire, but I'm not
Oh, what a pain I've got
It must be love

There's nothing I can do
All that I want is you
Look what I'm going through
It must be love

CHORUS:
It must be love, it must be love
I fall like a sparrow, fly like a dove
You must be the dream, I've been dreamin' of
Oh what a feeling, it must be love

- b. Love isn't an adjective, it's a verb. Not how I feel, but what I do. We need to know how God defines it.
3. Because we need the **power** of real love for our lives
 - a. Alternatives are like cheap fuel for an expensive car:
 - b. The promise of this chapter is in vs. 8: Love never fails. It never fails you, and it won't fail others.
 - c. Life is filled with all kinds of problems for which only love has the solution.
 - i. Spoken to Corinth, a very sexually immoral city; 1,000 of prostitutes; Church members suing each other
 - ii. Problems in your marriage/work/family/issues you are facing that no one else knows about?
Love never fails

iii. Let's say you have someone after you; treat them the way God wants you to and love will never fail you;

4. Because we need Jesus – Author Leonard Sweet says today that too many of us have JDD - Jesus Deficit Disorder

IS OUR CHRISTIANITY EMPTY OR INEFFECTIVE?

1. Important Parallelism – If I have all these things, but not love, “I have nothing to say;” “I don’t amount to much;” and “I have nothing to Give.” (I say nothing, am nothing, have nothing). It appears that I have all of these gifts, but in truth, I have nothing of value to offer without love.

2. Gift of Communication

a. *Tongues of Men* – the ability to communicate eloquently in the languages of men is a prized gift;

i. Corinth was a major center of commerce, so that every known language was spoken there – interpreters were worth their weight in gold;

ii. It was also a place where public speaking was highly prized, for its influence on people and culture;

b. *Tongues of Angels* –

i. Some think this is a reference to the way angels communicate with each other before God – “Holy, Holy, Holy.” People who speak like this can speak in a way that penetrates the heart;

ii. Perhaps a metaphor for eloquent speech – When Stephen was stoned in Acts 6 & 7, the Bible says his face became like an angel; In other words, his countenance was one of peace, beauty, and courage in the face of his own death; The voice of an angel becomes a way of speaking that eloquently brings peace in the face of hardship;

iii. A third, and I think more likely option, is a reference to ecstatic utterances in the Holy Spirit, usually connected to “glossolalia.” Paul had just spoken about this in the previous chapter.

iv. The point is that you can have these gifts, but not be grounded in God’s love, so that you sound like a cymbal that won’t stop clanging. I was the drummer in my junior high band at Gunn Jr. High School, and I tended to clang those cymbals at the wrong points. The last time I saw my band Director, Mr. Rusty, he was carrying luggage at DFW airport.

v. If you have the gift of eloquent speech, but don’t have love, you will just use that gift to your own ends – you will use it to manipulate or control people. If the reference here is to ecstatic utterances, then you will use that gift to make yourself feel superior to other believers. Your praise will also be artificial and meaningless to God.

vi. Illustration – Dr. W. A. Criswell tells the story of a preacher who held a revival way out in the country. The flames were burning bright. One night, he heard shouts outside the meeting space, and it was the Hammonds, coming in. They roared in on their wagon from the farm, and they were singing and shouting praises to God. They came every year, shouting and praising God, but when revival was over, no one saw them again until next year.

3. Intellectual Gifts

a. *Gift of Prophecy* – the interpretation of the times, and the ability to predict the future

b. *Fathom all mysteries and knowledge* – super smart and keen intellect. Knowing all mysteries makes me special in other people’s eyes. Someone who can tell you about the galaxies and the orbits of the planets, or about the seas and the currents in it, or about culture and geography and languages.

- c. It is possible for a man to be a professor and teach the gospel of Jesus and not love God or his students. It is possible for a man to approach this thing intellectually, and be wise in his own conceit, and use his knowledge to deprecate others and to establish his own personal ascendancy. To be intellectual, to be taught, to be trained, is not enough. There is something else and other and beyond and beside that a true follower of God and disciple of Jesus ought to have in his heart. “Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels emotionally, but I do not have that, I am nothing. And though I am intellectually superior in the understanding of these mysteries and knowledge, if I do not have that in my soul, I am still nothing” [1 Corinthians 13:1-2].¹

4. Practical Gifts

- a. To have incredible faith makes me special in someone’s eyes
- b. Rabbis were known as mountain movers, because of their ability to see things to completion. They had faith. They didn’t give up;
- c. This is possibly a reference too to someone who knows how to get things done. There is a premium on those kind of people – in the banking world, in insurance, engineering, merchandising – looking for people who can move mountains. Things happen when they are around.
- d. But this kind of person can get lost in their own efficiency. Someone like this can further the kingdom of God without being a Christian himself – without love.

5. Philanthropic Gifts

- a. *Give to the poor, and give my body to hardship/martyrdom*
- b. It is possible for someone to give, to be generous, to give much, but because of personal ambition, or for selfish reasons, so that the giver might be elevated, appreciated, talked about.
- c. Without Love, there is no profit where it counts.
- d. Illustration - Diane Sawyer exposed Robert Tilton. Who pretended to pray for every request sent to him, but was using his ministry as a means to get wealthy.²
- e. Way down there in the South in one of those Southern cities, in the days when the yellow fever raged and raged, in one of those summertime epidemics of yellow fever that was scourging one of our cities in the South, among the poor the dead carts drove down those squalid streets every evening picking up the dead, picking up the dead, hauling them out, dumping into those graves that were already pre-prepared—awful, tragic. There was a poor, poor mother who had a little boy, in a summer of one of those terrible sieges of yellow fever—alone, in a little squalid hut, just she and the little boy, and the mother said, “Son, by sundown, Mother will be in heaven. But, baby boy, Jesus will come and take care of you.” And the mother died that day. And when the dead cart came down that squalid street, her body was placed on the dead cart and behind it followed a little orphan boy. Out there in the cemetery she was buried in a grave, and the dead cart went on. And the little boy cried heartbrokenly over the fresh-made grave. And he cried himself to sleep, and the next morning when the sun arose, he awakened and began to sob and to cry again. And a man passing by stopped, walked over, addressed the boy, “And what are you doing here, son?” And the little fellow told him the story. That was his mother, and she’d been picked up by the dead cart the day before and buried there. And he said, “But Mother said before she died, ‘Son, Jesus will come and take care of you.’” And the man gulped, and he swallowed real hard and looked into the face of the boy and then said it. “Sonny, Jesus sent me to take care of you, and from now on, son, you are to be my boy.”³

¹ <https://www.wacriswell.com/sermons/1955/the-more-excellent-way/> Referenced August 26, 2018

² <https://www.wfaa.com/article/news/local/investigates/robert-tilton-trades-mega-tv-ministry-for-hotel-in-california/342529481> Accessed August 26th, 2018.

³ Ibid.

WALKING LOVE'S PATH – 15 MARKERS

1. Love is patient – suffers long.
 - a. We use the term patience for a wide variety of things – putting up with a generally difficult person, not losing our temper in rush hour traffic, not yelling a child who's throwing his umpteenth tantrum today, or who left the milk on the counter again and again.
 - b. One New Testament word for patience means patience in the face of difficult or painful circumstances. Here, Paul uses the other word, which means a persevering, patient love towards a person. It is the form of a self-sacrificial love we extend to someone else. This is the love God has toward us. "The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness (Exodus 34:6). The word describes God's incredibly patient love toward sinners. It isn't permissive. IT doesn't tolerate sin, abuse, or injustice in the sense of enabling those things, but it doesn't give up on the person.
2. Love is not easily angered (provoked) – by nature, we don't like to be interrupted. We don't like delays in our plans; We all desire trouble free lives, and we get irritated when things don't go our way. We don't like babies to cry through the night or checks to get lost in the mail. When you are easily provoked, you have a short fuse. You complain and grumble easily and get angry too quickly, plus you are quick to criticize. Love changes all of that. God's love centers you.
3. Love does not brag and is not arrogant
 - a. We all love to be made much of. We like to be admired. We like it when people notice our successes and miss our failures. We like it when we hear people say nice things about us. But we don't like it when people make fun of us or criticize us or laugh at us or humiliate us.
 - b. So we have developed strategies for minimizing our failures and maximizing our successes. We tend to draw attention to the one and cover over the other. There are crude ways of doing this like overt bragging and boasting and developing a certain cocky swagger or talking with a kind of devil-may-care conceit or an in-your-face kind of arrogance. In fact, in America, we have turned the vice of bragging into a virtue of entertainment.
 - c. But there are also more subtle, refined, acceptable ways of expressing our pride — like bringing the conversation back again and again to ourselves and what we've done, or even more subtly by constantly talking about our woundedness or our sadness, and about how badly things have gone for us. Self-pity and boasting are both forms of pride: one is pride in the heart of the weak, and the other is pride in the heart of the strong.
 - d. "If I am to love like Jesus loved, my ravenous craving for a trouble-free life must die."
4. Love does not seek its own
 - a. This doesn't mean we don't take care of business, or that it's wrong to enjoy life.
 - b. When Paul says, "Love seeks not its own," he is not saying that you shouldn't stand up for your own convictions — he died for his convictions. He is saying that you must be sure that the strength of your conviction is in proportion to the conviction being God's not just yours. To the degree that your preference is yours and not compellingly found in God's word, to that degree should you be slow to seek it, and slow to get angry when others don't share it. "Love seeks not its own." It seeks the good of the many, not just the comfort of self.
5. Love is Kind = You can be right but unkind, critical, judging.
6. Love does not envy – It's one thing to envy the possessions of others, but another to wish failure on others to make yourself ok;

7. Love doesn't dishonor others – behave gracelessly, a kind of Christianity which delights in being blunt and brutal;
8. Not Self-Seeking – There are those who always insist on their rights, their privileges instead of their responsibilities. John F. Kennedy's statement applies here – ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country.
9. Keeps no record of wrongs – doesn't store in memory, as an accountant keeping track of a ledger. Some people nurse their wrath;
10. Rejoices with the truth- Love finds no pleasure in evil. Not just our delight in doing wrong, but the pleasure which comes when we hear something derogatory about someone else; More interested in truth, than in our side winning, because truth leads to God, and people are more important than positions;
11. Love Protects – covers others when possible; Protects others against insult or injury;
12. Love trusts – people and God;
13. Always Hopes- Never chooses to lose hope – for the best in others. Illustration: Adam Clark, as an elementary aged student was shamed by his teacher as dumb. A visitor intervened when he heard the teacher doing that one day, and said "NO!" Clark eventually became a bright theologian. Love sees the best in others and protects.
14. Always perseveres – Accepting God's plan – not with passive resignation, but with Holy Joy.

CONCLUSION

In 1915, John Hicks was the pastor in the only Baptist church in Texline, TX. He had moved there from Dalhart, TX, another small, panhandle town. A young family started attending the church in Texline. They had moved to the town from Oklahoma to settle some land, and times were tough. There was a young boy in this family that the pastor invested in, letting him ring the church bell endlessly on Sundays, and having conversations with him about various things. The young boy was 10 years old.

Years later, the long-time pastor of FBC Oak Cliff was visiting a hospital in Dallas where he crossed paths with pastor Hicks in intensive care, and at death's door. Hicks told Wallace that he had spent so much time in those small panhandle churches, but didn't think he had truly made a difference. Dr. Wallace shared this story with his good friend, the long-time pastor of First Baptist Church, Dallas, Dr. W.A. Criswell. Dr. Criswell, as it turns out, knew pastor Hicks, because Criswell was the 10 year-old boy under Hicks care in TexLine, decades before.

Love never Fails.

INVITATION

1. The Key verse in this text is verse 10 – when completeness comes, the past disappears. You won't be complete until you accept Christ as your savior. Would you accept him today?
2. When the Spirit is blocked in your life, you act like a child, and your love is more childish than like God's love. Would you rededicate your life today?
3. Growth – Lean into Him. Put your hand in his hand. As him to make you more like him. Love like He loves.