



Love

“Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal” (1 Corinthians 13:1 NKJ).

Have you read 1 Corinthians 13 lately? When I felt that the Lord wanted me to write on love, I turned there to read the great love chapter. Then I thought, what more could be said?

If you can take the time, read that chapter again, prayerfully. As with other spiritual truths, I know God wants us to re-examine and re-process periodically. He wants us to grow right now in this greatest of all spiritual virtues—love.

Paul tells us that as important and as powerful as faith is, love is greater than faith. As necessary and as life-changing as hope is, love is greater than hope. Of the three—faith, hope and love, Paul said, “. . . the greatest of these is love” (1 Corinthians 13:13).

When Jesus was asked to tell which of all God’s commandments was greatest, Jesus answered: “‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind’ . . . and the second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’ On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets” (Matthew 22:38-40 NKJ). Loving God and others—as well as loving ourselves—is the foundation and structure for all God would have us to be, to know and to do.

I keep hearing the words to the song —“What the world needs now is love, sweet love. It’s the only thing that there’s just too little of.” That is so true. The world needs and wants love but knows so little about it. Even God’s people often give lip service to love but have no real heart knowledge of it. In 1 Corinthians and in many places throughout Scripture God included descriptions of love so we could not only recognize it but also learn to practice it in truth.

He also demonstrated His love and how to love through Jesus.

Following is a passage from Matthew 5 that is an especially difficult one for most of us. Jesus said:

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons [and daughters] of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so? Therefore you shall be perfect [complete] as our Father in heaven is perfect [complete]” (Matthew 5:43-48 NKJ).

Nobody said this would be easy. Jesus, however, not only said it, but He also did it. He died for His enemies. We were once His enemies, before we accepted Him as Lord and Savior.

We read in Proverbs 25:21: “If your enemy is hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he is thirsty, give him water to drink; for so you will heap coals of fire on his head, and the Lord will reward you.” “Heap[ing] coals of fire on his head” sounds so much like a good way to make our enemies suffer.

However, Vine’s *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* says “burning coal” is used symbolically, meaning “retribution by kindness, i.e.,

that, by conferring a favour on your enemy, you recall the wrong he has done to you, so that he repents, with pain of heart.” God wants to reward us, but it will be for doing good to our enemies. Paul said in Romans 12:21: “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”

Another group we are to love is God’s people. Jesus said: “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:34-35 NKJ).

Could it be possible that even Jesus’ disciples had difficulty loving each other? Probably. They argued about who would be the greatest in Jesus’ kingdom. John called himself “the disciple that Jesus loved.” What do you think Peter and the others thought of that? Judas was a thief and they all probably knew it. James and John’s mother asked special favors from Jesus for her sons. No wonder Jesus had to give them a new commandment to love each other.

Isn’t that just like the churches we attend? A bunch of imperfect people whom we are supposed to love as Jesus has loved us? We have trouble with that. There’s some we go out of our way not to speak to because they have offended us somehow. There’s some we hope won’t sit next to us because they look different than we do. Some parents won’t take their children to the nursery, and they cry. This upsets us. The minister of music always gives his wife the best solo parts. And then there’s the pastor whose sermons are often too long, who didn’t visit us in the hospital, who talks about money way too much, and who takes too many trips. “By this [love] all will know that you are My disciples . . .”

A lawyer asked Jesus one day, “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus asked him: “What is written in the law?” The lawyer answered (in part): “You shall love . . . your neighbor as yourself.” Jesus answered: “You have answered rightly; do this and you will live” (see Luke 10:25-37). Then the lawyer, “wanting to justify himself, said to Jesus, ‘And who is my neighbor?’” In the rest of the passage Jesus told the story of the Samaritan—whom we call the Good Samaritan—who helped a man who was

injured on the side of the road. Jesus pointed out that anyone we see in need, even if we do not know them, is our neighbor. (There are ways to help people whom we do not know and who are in need without putting ourselves in danger. We must always act with wisdom.)

Lastly, I want to mention our very closest neighbors—our wives, our husbands, our children. How do we treat the ones closest to us? It may be possible at work or at church for a while to put on a smile and act as though we love everyone. Even if we do not love someone, we can manage to act like we do as long as the interaction is brief—and if they treat us nicely. We can act as if we love everyone if we don’t get involved with small groups or individuals. It’s in small groups and one-on-one that our imperfections and idiosyncrasies emerge. At home, if there is pretense, it disappears quickly. In the family, everyone’s imperfections are easily seen. It’s at home that we most reveal what is in our hearts.

We read in 1 Corinthians 13:4-8: “Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not [easily] provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in evil, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails [ceases].”

Paul wrote and I close with this blessing: “And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love to one another and to all” (1 Thessalonians 3:12 NKJ). **SH**

GOD’S WORD FOR TODAY
Teaching Letter 32
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