

The Greatest Power in the Universe

Week 3: Love is...

Sunday, August 7, 2022

- **Today is week three of our focus on the Love of God- to us and through us- what we're calling in this short series the Greatest Power in the Universe.**
- **Focusing in on one key passage of scripture today. If there were a top ten list of NT scripture in culture, today's passage would definitely be on that list. In fact, it's almost become a cliché, which is very unfortunate as it is one of the most profound, and intensely practical, passages in all of scripture.**
- **SO- For the last two Sunday's we've been exploring the essential NT reality that...**

✠ **God. Is. Love. 1 John 4:8, 1 John 4:16 (Go Listen!)**

- **Love is not an attribute of God's nature, it is the totality of his nature, and all God's other attributes are, in some way expressions of his love.**
- **Important thing we've touched on, and had multiple 'front porch' discussions over the past two weeks, is the question of BOUNDARIES when it comes to how we love people with the love of God.**
 - **The good father allowed his prodigal son to run away. He also allowed his morally prideful son to stay outside the party, sulking in his own self-righteousness.**
 - **When Jesus saw how much the rich young ruler loved his own resources, Jesus let him walk away.**
 - **In Luke 10 Jesus tells his disciples to shake the dust off their feet and leave towns that do not welcome them and the gospel.**
- **SO, Yes, we do see biblical principles for placing- at times- healthy and appropriate boundaries in our relationships. KEY THOUGHT, however, is these are....**
 - **Boundaries, not limitations**
- **The prodigal's father rejoiced at his son's return, and restored him back into the family, with great celebration. He lovingly implores his older son to reconsider and return.**
- **In Mark 10, Mark tells us that Jesus 'loved' the RYR, even as he let him walk away.**
- **Jesus would go to the cross for that young man, as well as for the people of towns who rejected his disciples.**
- **Jesus had boundaries with people, but his love knew no limitations. Quick thoughts...**
 - **God's love through us may at times place boundaries, but it will be slow to do so. If possible and healthy love desires to keep the door open**
 - **Questions such as this need prayerful discussion, not easy principles. Details matter. Life is nuanced and can be messy. We need to be people who are willing to think and wrestle with these issues.**
- **OKAY- lets go to our text- 1 Corinthians 13- Chap 12 is powerful teaching about the body of Christ, how we all are necessary, we all have a role, and God has created us for different purposes. THEN, leading into what we know as chapter 13, Paul says "Now I want to show you the MOST EXCELLENT WAY"... and he begins this incredible discourse by proclaiming that when it comes to LIVING OUT the Love of God....**

✠ **Being 'right' isn't enough**

1 Corinthians 13:1-3 *If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. ² 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 do not have love, I am nothing. ³ If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

- **THINK about this description! This is a stunning correction to the way we so often think within Christian culture! You could be person who can...**
 - **Speak like angel- speak with divine authority**
 - **Gift of prophecy- speak divinely revealed truth**
 - **Possess wisdom, discernment, all knowledge**
 - **Unwavering faith, incredible resources, generosity, and can point to all the work you've done for God**
- **BUT, if you lack love, all of your authority, wisdom, knowledge, resources, faith, and work mean NOTHING. They do nothing for you and nothing for the kingdom.**
- **In fact, it's worse. Paul compares this kind of religious expression- for all its truth and authority- to be a 'clanging cymbal'! What does a clanging cymbal do? It gives people headaches! It drives people away.**
- **My friends, there are many loud voices in Christian culture today that can point to their many ministries, claim to stand upon God's truth, and speak with authority about the evils of our world- but do so with little love. These voices are not advancing the kingdom, they are driving people away.**
- **HAVING THE MORAL HIGH GROUND, being RIGHT and correct in all of our doctrine, (politics) is not enough. It's not even the most important thing. The most excellent way- the Jesus way- is the way of love.**

✠ **The big question: What does this love look like?**

1 Corinthians 13:4-8 Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.

- **This is one of the most self-explanatory paragraphs in the New Testament. It's not complicated or difficult to understand.**
- **Going to walk through this- LOTS of blanks, I want us to WRITE DOWN words, small step to help take powerful truth and penetrate from our heads to our hearts.**
- **But before we continue in 1 Corinthians 13... two other descriptions of the love of God thru us, from 1 John and 1 Peter.**

✠ **Love is PRACTICAL**

1 John 3:16-17 This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. ¹⁷ If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person?

- **Context make is clear that when John says "lay down our lives", he isn't just talking about being willing to die... but willing to lay down our LIVING.**
- **Love meets people where they actually are. It isn't so much interested in abstract principles as it is the real lives and concerns of people we get to know, see, and touch. People we may pray with, laugh with, and cry with- not because they are easy to love or are like us, but because they are human beings loved by God. Love is practical.**

✠ **Love is PURPOSEFUL**

1 Peter 4:8 Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.

- *Love isn't passive- the Greek word for 'deeply' here also described an athlete straining their muscles and growing stronger as a result- like a deep workout.*
- *Love- expressed through actions such as forgiveness- is a powerful antidote to the hurt we cause one another.*
- *But love doesn't just cover over a multitude of sins, it SEEKS to cover over a multitude of sins. Love is active, it is self-aware of how it impacts others, how it is perceived by others, how it can open a door, bring comfort, and make a person's situation better.*
- *Moving into 1 Cor 13....*

† Love is PATIENT

- *Patience exists in two different timeframes. There is the short term patience.... Love doesn't lose its cool and get angry when someone is late. How practical is that?*
- *But love also is patient in the long term. Love walks alongside a person as God works in their lives. Love doesn't give up. Love extends grace and mercy.*
- *Love doesn't enable, but love is very reluctant to close a door. Love is patient.*

† Love is KIND

- *This is so big- simple word with profound meaning. What are some synonyms.. friendly. Generous. Considerate. Polite. Good natured. Tender or warmhearted. Compassionate. Selfless. Genuinely seeking the best for other people.*
- *In the parable of the good Samaritan, the good Samaritan was KIND.*
- *Recently listened to story of a Jewish man who survived on the run in Nazi Germany in the closing months of the war. As he tells his story, his liberation was not at the hands of a great force like the allied army, but multiple incidents of simple and short term kindness by Germans who had not bought into Hitler's fear and hatred.*
- *Large acts of philanthropy are a blessing to our world, but simple human kindness- as Luke described the Island natives on Malta- the unusual kindness of God to all humanity- this truly has power to change our world.*
- *When we engage other people, consider other people, talk about other people... may the question be on our heart... AM I BEING KIND? KINDNESS has no political affiliation. Kindness doesn't make moral distinctions. Kindness makes all the difference. LOVE IS KIND.*

† Love does not ENVY, BOAST, and it is not PROUD

- *Think about the concepts of envy and boasting, in the context of how we relate to another person.*
- *ENVY wants something someone else has. Envy objectifies another person by what they possess.*
- *Boasting kind of opposite, but same. When we boast, or are prideful, building ourselves up in comparison to another person- even if just in our own minds.*
- *In both instances, our focus is ourselves. We seek to satisfy our own insecurity and lack of contentment at another person's expense.*
- *But love doesn't do this. Love rejoices with people when their experience goodness. Love doesn't seek to elevate ourselves above others- because our identity and foundation is the love God has for us!*

- **HEAR... we all struggle with pride.. and if you say, “I don’t struggle with pride”, well, that’s prideful! But the LOVE OF CHRIST IN US is humble. It has no need to point out another’s failings in order to make ourselves seem more valuable. It pushes against and diminishes the power pride seeks to hold over us.**
- **It may be subtle, but when our attitude toward another person is one of envy, boasting, or pridefulness, we are saying we are more deserving. That we are BETTER- that we have greater value.... Which is another way of saying another person has less value- and this is something LOVE NEVER DOES.**

† Love never **DISHONORS/ DEVALUES** another person.

- **We’ve talked about this principle over the past 3 months or so- and led to some honest conversations.**
- **I’ve talked with some of you how we apply this to people with whom we REALLY have problems. Historical figures like Hitler, Stalin... or closer to home, people who have wronged us or people we struggle accepting for a variety of reasons, moral or otherwise.**
- **These can be legitimate and good conversations, but we need to hold in mind the absolutely countercultural teaching of Jesus when it comes to loving – in all the ways we are discussing here- people we find profoundly hard to love.**

Luke 6:27-28.. 35 *“But to you who are listening I say: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.*

- **Jesus goes on with his famous teaching about turning the other cheek, giving someone the shirt off our back, and doing unto others as we would have them....**

³⁵ *But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked.*

- **One of the most profound ways we honor and value people- especially people with whom we have profound differences... is by LISTENING TO THEM.**

- **Love LISTENS.**

- **And not listening so we can be figuring out how to correct them... (how long do I have to listen before I tell them all the ways they are wrong...)... BUT listening with a sincere desire to understand.**

- **Love desires to understand.**

- **For most of us this requires great self-awareness, because one of the most unnoticed tendencies of our flesh (un-noticed by us- believe me, it is noticed by others) is to TALK OVER people. Just this would produce a much more civil society. MOVING ON....**

† Love is not **SELF-seeking**

- **Ways we can see and apply this are just about endless. To be self-seeking- attribute of pride- is one the most basic characteristics of our flesh- old human nature.**
- **Being self-seeking as at the root of performance based acceptance, and in personal relationships it is absolutely toxic.**
- **This is when a person may say “I love you”, but what they really mean is “I love what you do for me... and if you stop doing it for me, I’m going to love you less... because, you know, this is really all about me.”**

† Love is not easily **ANGERED**

- **Big! If you find yourself being easily angered- not just with people close to you, but with the world around you... if you are prone to yell at the TV and have residual anger... you might need counseling.**
- **I'm serious. Unhealthy anger (and it's almost always unhealthy) is the fruit of lots of emotional and spiritual... unhealth, and it can take effort and time to unpack. But love will overcome anger when that love leads them to do the hard work of discovering- and healing- the source of that anger.**

† Love doesn't hold a GRUDGE. Love FORGIVES

- **The scripture says "Love keeps no records of wrongs."**
- **Do you have a broken relationship that has just stayed broken... because the hurt, maybe anger, resentment... just doesn't seem to go away? God may be leading you to consider this.**
- **This idea always requires wisdom. To 'keep no record of wrongs' doesn't necessarily mean we put ourselves- or others- back into unhealthy situations.**
- **But as far as it depends upon US... and by God's grace and love in OUR LIVES- we will begin to let go of the hurt, the grudge, the list of grievances- that can take a forgivable offense and make it radioactive- where the resentment just never goes away.**
- **In Romans 12 Paul says "If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone." Context of this statement? How we love other people.**

† Love never delights in EVIL

- **We may say "Well, I never delight in evil..." hold on- let's think about this.**
- **Do you know what 'schadenfreude' means? 'Pleasure derived from another's misfortune'.**
- **We need to have a full definition of the word 'evil' here. It is anything that is outside, or counter to, the nature and character of God's goodness.**
- **So, human suffering- in any form- result of evil. When we pleasure or joy in suffering or misfortune of another person, delighting in evil- and love doesn't do that!**
- **Get a little more personal/subtle. One of the dominant/common activities in today's political dialog- if you could even call it that- is mocking people who think differently- people on the other side of an issue.**
- **I get it! It's funny! It brings delight! I don't want to be the guy who is so serious he never laughs at anything- but before we indulge too deeply in self-satisfaction of seeing our 'opponents' put down, marginalized, or suffer indignation- we need to ask... IS THIS HELPING OUR SITUATION? IS THIS LOVING?**
- **Love doesn't delight.... RATHER....**

† Love loves TRUTH

- **Love REJOICES with the truth. This means more than just thinking we KNOW what the truth is. Love desires for truth to be shared among people, even if this requires the unfathomable concept that WE might possibly not be 100% correct. To REJOICE in the truth means doing the loving work of listening, considering, dialoging, waiting patiently, forgiving, and being open to God's correction in our own lives.**
- **Then Paul emphasizes 4 things Love ALWAYS does.**

† Love always...

- **Love always Protects- Trusts- Hopes- Perseveres.**

- For ALL of these you could say “Well, YEAH, but what about when...” and you may be right! Situations are nuanced, details matter, every story is different... especially when we are raised children! BUT WE CANNOT IGNORE THE WORD.. ALWAYS.
- In the context of wisdom and all the other attributes of love... Love will DESIRE, to work in the best possible way... to PROTECT, to TRUST, to NOT LOSE HOPE, and to PESEVERE.
- Can sum all of this up with Paul’s exclamation point...

† Love NEVER fails.

- Friends, we know the tragic reality that relationships fail all the time. There may be times when the wisest and most loving thing to do is to allow a relationship to come to an end, as painful as it may be. Details matter.
- But we should be deeply encouraged by the truth that GOD’S LOVE never fails. God’s love for you, for a person you may be thinking of, and for all humanity—never fails.
- AND BECAUSE THIS IS TRUE, regardless of what anyone else or anyone around you may do, when YOU LOVE with the love of God, this love will NEVER fail to have impact. You may not see it, but this love will never fail to bring God’s light into the brokenness of our world.
- Paul ends this thought with a beautiful paragraph you well know, were we are shown what the greatest things in life truly are.

† The greatest of these

1 Corinthians 13:8-13 Love 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. ⁹ For we know in part and we prophesy in part, ¹⁰ but when completeness comes, what is in part disappears.

- Think of this! Paul describes three things- prophecies, tongues, knowledge. Image of an understanding and knowledge that is connected to God. Knowledge of TRUTH.... But no matter how wise, learned, or confident we may be in our understanding... our knowledge of truth is INCOMPLETE, and it will pass away. It will cease to be important! When completeness comes, it will be far bigger- something beyond- any knowledge of truth we could have.

¹¹ When 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 the ways of childhood behind me.

- Hear! God calling us to GROW UP. Growing up in faith, true spiritual maturity, isn’t matter of what we KNOW, or our correctness... it is a matter of how we LOVE.

¹² For now we see only a 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. ¹³ And now these three remain:

- When all our certainty/ knowledge is shaken, when all that divides us- pride, anger, self-centeredness, own wisdom, even what at times unite us- when ALL THIS IS FINALLY STRIPPED AWAY... 3 things will remain.

faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

- God’s invitation- command- is clear, and essential.
- RIGHT NOW, IN THE MIDST OF LIFE AS IT REALLY IS...
- Above all else, in how we engage this world around us, may we be people of FAITH, HOPE, and LOVE.
- And greater than anything else, may we be people- who by the Loving Grace of God have been brought from death to live- may we be people who LOVE.