

THE ULTIMATE GIFT

21st November 2021

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WEEK 11 - LOVE

Blurb:

*The gift of love, comes with a sting in the tail, or is it in the tale?
Love is the anchor for all the others and should permeate everything we do...*

1 Corinthians 12:27-13:13

The Message

²⁷⁻³¹ You are Christ's body—that's who you are! You must never forget this. Only as you accept your part of that body does your "part" mean anything. You're familiar with some of the parts that God has formed in his church, which is his "body":
apostles
prophets
teachers
miracle workers
healers
helpers
organizers
those who pray in tongues.

But it's obvious by now, isn't it, that Christ's church is a complete Body and not a gigantic, unidimensional Part? It's not all Apostle, not all Prophet, not all Miracle Worker, not all Healer, not all Prayer in Tongues, not all Interpreter of Tongues. And yet some of you keep competing for so-called "important" parts.

But now I want to lay out a far better way for you.

The Way of Love

13 If I speak with human eloquence and angelic ecstasy but don't love, I'm nothing but the creaking of a rusty gate.

² If I speak God's Word with power, revealing all his mysteries and making everything plain as day, and if I have faith that says to a mountain, "Jump," and it jumps, but I don't love, I'm nothing.

³⁻⁷ If I give everything I own to the poor and even go to the stake to be burned as a martyr, but I don't love, I've gotten nowhere. So, no matter what I say, what I believe, and what I do, I'm bankrupt without love.

Love never gives up.

Love cares more for others than for self.

Love doesn't want what it doesn't have.

Love doesn't strut,

Doesn't have a swelled head,

Doesn't force itself on others,

Isn't always "me first,"

Doesn't fly off the handle,
Doesn't keep score of the sins of others,
Doesn't revel when others grovel,
Takes pleasure in the flowering of truth,
Puts up with anything,
Trusts God always,
Always looks for the best,
Never looks back,
But keeps going to the end.

⁸⁻¹⁰ Love never dies. Inspired speech will be over some day; praying in tongues will end; understanding will reach its limit. We know only a portion of the truth, and what we say about God is always incomplete. But when the Complete arrives, our incompletes will be canceled.

¹¹ When I was an infant at my mother's breast, I gurgled and cooed like any infant. When I grew up, I left those infant ways for good.

¹² We don't yet see things clearly. We're squinting in a fog, peering through a mist. But it won't be long before the weather clears and the sun shines bright! We'll see it all then, see it all as clearly as God sees us, knowing him directly just as he knows us!

¹³ But for right now, until that completeness, we have three things to do to lead us toward that consummation: Trust steadily in God, hope unswervingly, love extravagantly. And the best of the three is love.

Sermon

This week we peel back the most anticipated gift in our ultimate gift series; I'll bet you were expecting this one to be the ultimate gift. The gift of love seems to have no equal; even the scriptures confirm the supremacy of love.... So what could be the ultimate gift if it is not love? Well I guess you will have to be here next week....

As much as we think we know about love, inasmuch as the three dominant world religions preach love... don't you sometimes wonder with me, why we haven't got it right yet? We can quote poetry and love songs, we can spend hours creating the right atmosphere for a special someone, yet still miss the mark when it comes to loving our neighbour as ourselves.

In writing to the Corinthians, Paul is actually a little angry. In this fledgling church people have been doing what people do best... comparing and competing. I believe the teaching contained in 13, should be imprinted on our brains, hearts, and stomachs perhaps even on our foreheads too! Simply because we are still caught up in an endless cycle of considering ourselves better than others. Truth be told there is still an incredible amount we can learn about love.

As Paul puts it without love we are nothing. Even if we recall the gifts we have explored so far; work, money, friends, learning, problems, family, laughter, dreams, giving, and gratitude. Not one of those is of any value unless we receive and use it with love. The church without love is just another social service organization, as for us as individuals without love don't even consider yourself a good person.

So what then do we do with this gift?

Well inasmuch as I struggle along with you, allow me to offer some thought seeds.

We begin to understand love when we care for a baby, without a clear understanding of the baby's need or hope of reciprocity, we provide all the essentials for growth. For the sole purpose of enjoying every life discovery the baby makes as it grows to eventual adulthood. Then the lesson repeats itself as age takes its toll and what was once a vibrant life becomes frail and dependent. Again we offer deep care without expectation of reward. In our love for one another we ought to be anticipating, and acting to meet one another's needs. Especially within our families and the church community, but followers of Jesus must go further, we are also commanded to love the stranger in the same way!

Acting in love toward one another we purposefully seek out what is best for the other even if it means a little less for our self. We willingly seek to draw out the best in everyone, that would mean giving the best of ourselves to the benefit of everybody around us. We share in celebration without jealousy, and commiserate in setback without spite. We anchor one another's highs and raise up each others lows.

This is beginning to sound a bit like a valentines card isn't it? Wait there's more...

Something vital we need to understand about love is that it is the very core of God. From Genesis 1 to Revelation 22 this love is recorded. Yes there are great dramatic judgments, and terrible acts that we would now consider war crimes. There are even some unspeakable acts, but consistently through it all God acts in loving mercy. At just the right moment in time when Israel had forgotten her special relationship with God; God sent his son and came to live as one of us. Only to be rejected, abused, and crucified. Yet love was not beaten; death could not restrict loves power. Therefore everyone anywhere today can have an intimate relationship with the creator of everything.

During the coming week consider this.. every time you act in love toward another, you are being the very presence of the living God in that persons life! Love is enabled by God, to hold the people of God together eternally!

I want to leave you with these words from a book of poetry called 'Love is an Attitude'.

The magnitude love achieves is
measured by its
strength of giving,
perception of understanding,
faith of purpose
through the passage of time.

Amen.