

Sunday Sermon: February 3, 2019

Sermon Text: 1 Corinthians 12:31B–13:13

Sermon Theme: Joined Together to Work Together in Love

And now I will show you the most excellent way.

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. ²If 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. ³If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.

⁴Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. ⁵It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. ⁶Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. ⁷It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

⁸Love 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. ⁹For we know in part and we prophesy in part, ¹⁰but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears. ¹¹When 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 childish ways behind me. ¹²Now we see but a poor 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.

¹³And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

Studies show that a highly motivated work force is one of the factors that make a business successful. If the employees are part of the process, if they feel plugged in and needed, then they will take ownership of their job and want to work hard for success.

This type of research has led many large companies like Apple and Google to make huge changes like remodeling their offices to make them look less official and more vibrant and fun. It has led many companies to use a split time model for work where there is some time working from home and some time at an office. It has also led to companies modifying their maternity leave to be more family friendly.

While those are all pretty big, sweeping, changes that are easy to see, most, if not all, business listen to this research and try to make their businesses a place where their employees want to work.

A church is not a business, but there are some similarities between congregation members and employees. First, a highly motivated group of Christians can do amazing things, just like a highly motivated group of employees. Secondly, Christians will want to work together with one another because they know that God will see and appreciate their gifts and their acts of service to him in the same way a group of employees will want to work for their company when they feel appreciated.

The one big difference between a business and a Christian congregation is work we do and why we are doing it. The employee works a job for money and recognition. Christians don't do that in church. But what we do is very important. We are here to spread the Gospel because that is what God tells us to do. He has brought us here to join us together so that we can work together to show Christian love.

Two weeks ago, we mentioned the sin of the Corinthian congregation. If we understand that sin and the problems it was causing, we will get a much deeper understanding of why Paul includes this long section about love in his letter.

The Corinthian Christians struggled with the sin of pride. This showed itself in many arguments and disputes. There were factions in the Corinthian churches, arguments about spiritual gifts and problems with worship inside their congregation. The sin of pride was very powerful.

Paul doesn't ever question that the Corinthians believed in Jesus, what he does teach and admonish is the way they showed that faith through their actions. He showed them pride was separating them instead of their faith and love for one another joining them together.

Some say that the opposite of loving someone and showing love to someone is hating them. There are many reasons that we will not do something loving for someone that do not rise to the level of hate. I have heard others say that the opposite of loving someone else is really loving ourselves too much.

This seems much closer to the words of Paul in our sermon text. The Corinthians loved themselves too much that they were not showing love to others. They had too much sinful pride in their lives.

For almost 13 chapters, Paul has called the Corinthians to repent by laying out their sin and the other sins pride was leading them into. He ends chapter 12 with the simplest of words to introduce chapter 13: **And now I will show you the most excellent way.**

What follows is Paul teaching them how Christians should act and look like. What follows is an exhortation, a godly encouragement, of the way that the Corinthians should live. This encouragement ends with the conclusion: **And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.**

These words are often misused or misapplied by many well-meaning Christians. To understand them, we have to look at what Paul is not saying. Paul is not saying that we should throw faith and hope out the window and just love one another. He is not saying that we should throw out all we believe for the sake of loving others.

What Paul is saying, goes along with the last 12 chapters. Knowing that these people believe in their Savior Jesus, he tells them to get rid of their sinful pride about their faith and instead love their God and serve others with the same kind of love.

Arrogance and pride can so easily happen for those who believe in Jesus. It is human to want to be on the winning team and to take pride in that win. With the Super Bowl this afternoon, there will be millions of people that did not step on the field, that did nothing to win the game, but they will still take pride in the win. They will feel bigger and better than others because their team won.

It's so easy for Christians to fall into sinful pride because we are on the winning team. Jesus has won the victory over our enemies sin, death, and the devil. We can feel pride because Jesus has given us that victory. We can be full of pride because we see other churches walking away from the Bible, but we do not. We can be full of pride because our congregation is so good at being friendly, or some program, and another congregation is not. We can, and often do look down on others, because they don't know about their Savior and we do.

Sinful pride is so dangerous for Christian people of faith, because they are the opposite of the love that Christ wants us to show to others. Christ wants us to share the news of his forgiveness and his salvation with others because they do not have a strong knowledge of the Bible, because they are confused about sin, because they never heard of their Savior.

The greatest act of love anyone can ever share is to use the Law and Gospel to lead someone to repentance and to the love of Christ who forgives them.

God gives us our faith to share. A man with a bag of seed does, not hoard the seed, he plants the seed because he knows there will always be more. That's what God wants us to do with our faith. Show love to others, share our faith with others, because there will always be more.

The other thing Paul is saying is that we should not just talk about loving others, but don't forget to show love to those whom you are closest with, especially those who are part of our congregation.

Paul basis all this talk about love on the love that God has for us. **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. 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 have not love, I am nothing. ³ If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.**

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⁸ Love never fails.

This has been called one of the most beautiful parts of Scripture..... and it is, but probably not for the reason you think. It is the most beautiful part of Scripture because it is talking about the example of love that Jesus has shown to us.

We can see Jesus in each of the statements. Jesus spoke in the tongues of men and angels, he could fathom mysteries and had all knowledge and prophecy, he had faith that could do amazing things, he gave of his time, talents and treasures to the poor, he surrendered his body into death that we might live. And he did all of these things perfectly, out of love for us. More than that he was patient, kind, not easily angered, and he kept no record of wrongs with you and me. He did not turn his back on sinners like you and me, instead he went to the cross and showed his love for our souls by dying there.

Jesus is the perfect reflection of all that Paul is saying. Jesus never failed in his love for us, however, so many times we fail in our love for others, even with those we are closest with in faith. We speak our minds, not in love, but to be heard and acknowledged. Many times we want to show others how smart we are about this topic or that, not leaving any room for discussion or other view points. Many times we are like the Corinthians, we are anything but loving and kind, we are often rude and self-seeking. We want to hold grudges and not forgive. We delight in sharing and receiving gossip. We want to hold sins over other people's heads like spiritual blackmail. I still haven't forgiven you because you did this to me that one time.

This section is beautiful, but is also damning for the sinner. We realize that we have not loved the way that we should. If we think that love will get us to heaven and try to follow love as a path that earns us heaven, we will be so disappointed. This path of love will lead to the same place that all other false paths of goodness lead to; death and hell.

The only path that leads to forgiveness and heaven is the path that is through Jesus. It is the love that Jesus shows to us that has forgiven us. This is the love that we reflect to others.

We may not always have an opportunity to put on our handy-man, cooking, baking or car fixing hat and serve others with those gifts, but we will always be able to show Christian love by sharing the Word with those who do not know and encouraging our brothers and sisters in Christ in their faith.

The Corinthians struggled with sinful pride. They did not put their faith into action. We struggle with the same thing. May God give us hearts that are not pointed inward, showing love only to ourselves, but may we always be reminded that the love we show to others is really a reflection of the love that God has shown to us. **And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.**