

20181216 ADVENT – WEEK 3 – LOVE



ADVENT – WEEK 3 – LOVE (Prepared for workers at Santa’s Wonderland) Dec 16, 2018

Hope - we discovered that there can be no hope without faith. David tells us in Psalm 27 that he would have despaired if he had not hoped (or had faith) to see the goodness of the Lord in the Land of the living. His hope was based on faith that God was good and that things would get better in his life.

Peace - is based in receiving God’s forgiveness for the things that we ourselves have thought, done, or said that have been contrary to God’s word. When we realize His gracious forgiveness, we are able to forgive others and forgive ourselves. In the forgiveness we find restoration which is the true meaning of **Shalom**.

Love – Christian love is different than the world’s kind of love. Again, it calls us to go beyond our own capabilities and to rely on God to work in and through us.

The Apostle Paul wrote several letters to the Church in Corinth, Greece. They were a wealthy church and were a church with many problems and dysfunctions. They were beset constantly with all sorts of divisions, and Paul kept trying to bring them back together in Christ. One of his more powerful chapters is 1 Corinthians chapter 13. Paul clearly states what *agape* (selfless God-like) love looks like. Paul writes,

⁴ Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. ⁵ It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.

⁶ Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. ⁷ It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. ⁸ Love never fails.

Love is Patient

These are beautiful words, but they are convicting words. Love is patient. That means that if I am to love I must be patient. The dictionary says patience means “able to accept or tolerate delays, problems, or suffering without becoming annoyed or anxious”. I wish I could say that was me, but it isn’t. Patience is not a natural virtue. It is in our nature to want to try to fix things on our own. But the reality is that only God can give us the ability to accept or tolerate delays, problems, or suffering without becoming anxious. It is something that only God can give. As a human, I am impatient with myself and others. God is telling me and you to be patient with one another. One of my favorite verses is 1 Peter 5:7 which says, “Cast all of your cares before the Lord for He cares for you.” That’s the opposite of being impatient. And in the context of

“love”, patience means that we must accept and tolerate each other even when it is unnatural to do so.

Love is Kind

True love must be kind. But what does it mean to be kind? The dictionary defines kind as being kindly, good-natured, kindhearted, warmhearted, caring, affectionate, loving, warm, considerate, helpful, thoughtful, obliging, unselfish, selfless, attentative, compassionate, sympathetic, big-hearted, neighborly, well-meaning, hospitable. I am commanded to be kind to my brothers and sisters, even when I may not feel like it. Kindness is very important in a marriage. Sandy and I have learned over the years that even when we don't feel like showing kindness to one another, it is being kind that makes the difference. It is part of *agape* love. Our kindness to one another has to come from somewhere other than ourselves because sometimes, we just don't feel like being kind. But, if we really want to love like Jesus taught us to love, we will be kind even when our emotions tell us to behave otherwise.

Love Does Not Envy

Christian love does not envy. That means that when we love like Jesus loved, we are delighted when our brothers or sisters are doing well. We don't begrudge them for talents and abilities they might have. Becoming upset by the resources and talents that others have will destroy us. There will always be a bigger fish, someone with a larger bank account, a better horseman or horsewoman. Love doesn't have to be the best that ever was at anything. Love acknowledges the accomplishments of others and the wealth they might have and it is happy for them. Love in fact looks to and tries to help our Christian brothers and sisters to be the very best versions of themselves. To do that is unselfish.

Love does not Boast

I once had a colleague that said, “Well, I talk about my accomplishments because you have to toot your own horn. Nobody else is going to do it for you.” No attitude could be farther from what God intends for each of us. This doesn't mean we need to go around putting ourselves down, but we sure don't need to be “tooting our own horn”. Scripture tells us, “humble yourselves before the mighty hand of God and HE will lift you up.” When I was younger I

spoke incessantly about myself. I was ego-centric because I was selfish. I was insecure. I am learning hopefully to shut up about myself and to steer and point others to the great things God has done. I'm doing my best to be better at this. Love boasts about God and His goodness instead of about oneself.

Love is not Proud

I don't know about you all, but it seems the closer I am to Jesus the less proud I feel in myself about anything that I do or accomplish. I begin to realize that any successes I have are from Him. I can't do anything right without having Him do it through me. This has been particularly difficult for me for the 2.1/2 years I have been pastoring. It is all new to me, and I seem to make mistake after mistake. A week doesn't go by without someone telling me about something I've said or done that isn't right. I am learning to say, "I accept that criticism and I'll try to do better." And, I really mean it. It keeps me from becoming proud. I've been studying Paul's thorn in the flesh, and I've come to realize that these thorns are given to me to keep me humble. True love carries within it a great sense of humility, knowing it is only through God that we can attempt to love others as Jesus did.

Love does not Dishonor Others

I think it is a natural tendency for humans to dishonor others to feel better about themselves. This can take the form of gossip, telling tales, or just talking about the faults of others. Love doesn't do that. It tries to give honor to others where honor is due. When we dishonor others, we should ask God's forgiveness and move on. We've got our own problems.

Love is Not Self-Seeking

The heart of Christian love is that it loves not expecting a return. I can tell you that when I let God love in and through me, there always seems to be a return, but it usually comes from some other place. That's just the way God's economy works. When we give of ourselves to others it is in its purest form when those to whom we give have nothing to give us. If we give and keep a score of what we've given looking for the recipient to give back, we are not giving, we are investing. That is not love. Christian love gives freely without expectation.

Love is not Easily-Angered

Anger is a reaction we feel when we've suffered an undeserved wrong or when our rights have been violated. It is a reaction to fear, pain, or frustration. Anger is the opposite of Christian love. Our fear, pain, and frustration have to be laid at the foot of the cross. It is the only thing that will heal them. When I was young I had a hot head. I seemed to get angry about everything. In time, I realized that I was afraid of failure. I was in pain because of things in my past, and I was frustrated at where I was in life. My reaction to this was anger. In time I realized that my anger was going to destroy me. I had to humble myself and surrender myself again and again to the Lord. This helped me to not be a person now who is easily angered. Anger is almost always self-destructive, and it gives Satan control of the situation.

Love Doesn't Keep a Record of Wrongs

True Christian love doesn't keep score. It doesn't dwell in the past. It doesn't recount wrongs destroying one's present or future. It just moves on. Score keeping gets very wearisome. Being in a tit for tat relationship with those around us will wear us out. My marriage has survived by keeping no record of wrongs. If Sandy and I kept records of the wrongs we've done to one another, we would have a list a mile long, been miserable for 39 years, and we would be finished by now. When we learn to leave wrongs behind we are doing what God does for His mercies are new every morning. Great is His faithfulness. (Lamentations 3:20)

Love Does Not Delight With Evil but Rejoices with the Truth

Love does not delight in wrong done to others. Satan is alive and well on planet earth. He desires to kill and destroy the joy of every believer. He seeks to destroy the unity of the church. He seeks to isolate us so he can assassinate us. When we fail to exercise real Christian love, we give him the reins of our lives. In an odd way we are giving in to evil and delighting in it. When we deny him that role, we are rejoicing with the truth.

Love always Protects

Christian love protects. It seeks to keep harm from coming to others. That's the model. That's what we are to strive for. Sometimes we actually harm one another, and that is where Holy Spirit forgiveness comes in. In my marriage sometimes I harm instead of protecting. I usually don't do it intentionally, but nevertheless I do it. Sandy protects me and our relationship by

extending forgiveness to me even when I haven't earned it or deserve it. That is grace. The world never protects. It is a dog eat dog world. Christian love is quite different.

Love always Trusts

Christian love keeps trusting. I have noticed in life that people who trust no one are not generally very trustworthy. Paul is telling us to be people that err on the side of trusting other believers. Will they fail us? Yes. Should we keep trying to trust each other? Yes. Love always trusts. This doesn't mean that we should trust someone who has repeatedly shown us that they are not trustworthy, but it tells us to take our brothers and sisters in the entirety of who they are. We are to err on the side of being trusting people. That is an important part of Christian love.

Love always Hopes and Love Always Perseveres

Christian love keeps hoping. Christian love is steadfast and keeps on keeping on. The world's love gives up at the first sign of problems, and it sure doesn't keep trying. That hope that we have in each other is based in the hope that God is doing a profound work in each of our lives. God is not through with any of us yet, so we shouldn't be through with each other either. That is perseverance. That means to keep on keeping on with each other even when our friendships encounter various trials.

Paul was desperately calling the Corinthian church to be different from the world. Do we get this right? Often no. Do we see what God-like love looks like? Yes. He wrote this through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit because God knew that we would have all kinds of trouble with this thing called love, but, through the power of the Holy Spirit, we can get it right.

2 Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, ² then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. ³ Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, ⁴ not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.⁵ In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:⁶ Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; ⁷ rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!

Jesus said, "Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends." (John 15:13 NIV) My prayer is that God will help me today to love like He loves. Perhaps He wants to do a work in you as well. - In the precious Name of Jesus. Amen

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