

The More Excellent Way

Sermon by Andy Sochor

Text: 1 Corinthians 13:1-13

In this chapter, Paul took a break from discussing spiritual gifts to discuss love. However, this was not an unrelated subject. Miraculous spiritual gifts were desirable and helpful, yet he was going to show them “a still more excellent way” (1 Corinthians 12:31) – love. Paul explained that love is preferred over spiritual gifts, defined what love is, and explained that it endures forever.

Love Is Preferred (v. 1-3)

- Remember the context – this is a “more excellent way” compared to the exercising of miraculous spiritual gifts; love is a fundamental characteristic of a Christian, yet it was possible to act without love
- What they might have done without love:
 - Speak in tongues (v. 1) – miraculous gift (Acts 2:7-11); without love, it was just noise; meant to edify (1 Corinthians 14:19, 26), but could be used to provoke envy and division
 - Possess gifts of prophecy, knowledge, faith (v. 2) – love must be the motivation in using these things (cf. 1 Corinthians 8:1)
 - Sacrifice possessions or our lives (v. 3) – would appear to be noble, but we must not have ulterior motives
- No matter what good things we do, if they are done without love, they are worthless

Love Defined (v. 4-7)

- In describing love, Paul also described the character of God (1 John 4:8) – this is what we strive for (1 John 4:11)
 - Patient (v. 4) – longsuffering (1 Thessalonians 5:14-15)
 - Kind (v. 4) – act benevolently (Strong’s); do good (Galatians 6:9-10); we love in deed (1 John 3:18)
 - Not jealous (v. 4) – envy, covetousness; Paul did not seek what was theirs, but them (2 Corinthians 12:14)
 - Does not brag (v. 4) – boast; we are to boast only in the Lord (1 Corinthians 1:31); without love, we are nothing (v. 2)
 - Not arrogant (v. 4) – think too highly of oneself; exercise humility before God and others (Psalm 8:3-4; Philippians 2:3-4)
 - Does not act unbecomingly (v. 5) – improper (same word in 1 Corinthians 7:36); inconsiderate; unfair to others
 - Does not seek its own (v. 5) – selfishness; puts God and others first (Matthew 22:35-40)

- Not provoked (v. 5) – provoked to anger; we are to turn the other cheek (Matthew 5:39)
- Does not take into account a wrong suffered (v. 5) – holding a grudge (Leviticus 19:18)
- Does not rejoice in unrighteousness (v. 6) – does not want to see sin committed by or against someone
- Rejoices with the truth (v. 6) – loves God’s word (Psalm 119:97); loves to see others faithful to it (3 John 4)
- Bears all things (v. 7) – “covers” the sins of others (1 Peter 4:8); does not gossip about them (2 Timothy 3:3)
- Hopes all things (v. 7) – hopes the best of others when we can no longer assume the best
- Endures all things (v. 7) – willing to suffer wrong (cf. 1 Corinthians 6:7-8)
- We are to do all things in love (1 Corinthians 16:14) – according to this definition, not the world’s definition

Love Endures Forever

- True Bible love does not fail – endures all things” (v. 7); more than a feeling; feelings change; true Bible love is a conscious decision (cf. Titus 2:3-4)
- Endures longer than miraculous spiritual gifts (v. 8-12) – these miraculous gifts would endure until God’s revelation was fully given (v. 8-10; cf. Jude 3)
- Endures longer than faith and hope (v. 13) – this looks forward to the time when we reach heaven; faith will become sight (2 Corinthians 5:7; 1 John 3:2); hope will be realized (1 Peter 1:13; Romans 8:24); love will endure (cf. 1 John 3:2; 4:8)

Conclusion

- When Paul described love, he was describing a “more excellent way” (1 Corinthians 12:31) – not just a feeling; not just something we talk about; not just natural affection
- Bible love (agape) is something we consciously decide to do – it is being like God
- We must follow this “more excellent way” – nothing else matters; we must do all things in love (1 Corinthians 16:14)