



Love in Action -- 1 Corinthians 13:1-13

- True/False – God’s Word emphasizes that Christians should be known for their love for others, and should be growing in that love...no question about that one...but then, how about this...
- True/False -- The world in which we live is sometimes confused about the topic of love.
 - that one’s true as well, isn’t it...how about this one?...
- True/False – Followers of Christ like you and me are sometimes impacted by the world’s ideas in ways that lead us away from what God has commanded us to be, and to do...that’s three true ones in a row, for sure...

- Introduction

- What the world says about love.

a. Finding lasting love is hopeless.

- one magazine article I read posed the question – “What starts love and what stops love?”
- one woman sarcastically said, **“What starts love is, meeting a man. What stops love is, meeting a man.”**
- Another writer said – **“There are many who believe we would be far better off replacing Saint Valentine with Saint Jude, the patron saint of hopeless causes.”**

b. Love is a reservoir of feelings that will probably dry up.

- another article I read was entitled **“Why Love Was Not Built to Last”**
- the writer spoke of a person who stopped loving her husband after he had failed her in some way...she said – **“Ten years of loving that man and all of a sudden it’s gone. I don’t understand.”**
- then the author said, **“The explanation? Susie has experienced what I’ve come to recognize in my two decades of psychotherapeutic work with couples in distress: that love is very much a reservoir, and over time there may be additions to it or outflow. People in love rarely seem to know how close to empty this reservoir may be...while most of us can vividly recall each step along the road to falling in love, the process of falling out of love is largely invisible until completed.”**
- so there it is – love is a reservoir of feelings that was never intended to last...

c. Love is an absence of problems.

- another writer said, **“Healthy love is when you find someone whom you like, admire, and respect...Love stops when you discover things about him that you don’t respect. He’s not kind, or has attributes you can’t stand: horrible manners, no tact, etc. You realize you can’t have the relationship you envisioned with this person.”**
- there may be some truth about that as you’re getting to know someone in a dating relationship—but what about those who think that’s true if they’re married?...
- a well known divorce attorney, **Marvin Mitchelson**, wrote a book entitled **“Made in Heaven, Settled in Court”**...
 - **“What starts love is looking through rose-colored glasses. You idealize your future with this person, you put your best foot forward. Then real living sets**

in. Romance takes a back seat to bills, job aggravations, family problems. You focus on these things instead of cultivating the relationship.”

- does it really have to be one or the other?...can't you focus on problems and get them solved even while you're growing in love?...

- that's why this morning we want to talk about **Practicing Biblical Love...**
- with that in mind, please open your Bible to 1 Corinthians chapter 13...

3 steps necessary to grow God's kind of love.

I. Understand Love's Definition.

- one of the obvious lessons that flows out of the illustrations from the world we read earlier was the significantly different definitions you could use for love...
- well, there is no way we can grow in something unless we understand what it is we're actually talking about...there were three different words used for love in Bible times

A. Range of Greek words.

1. Eros.

- we of course get our word erotic from that word...
- it would be alluding to romantic or sexual love...
- this particular word is never used in Scripture...
- God created erotic love and when it is practiced properly, and biblically and for His glory, it can be a beautiful thing...but, that's not what's in focus in this text...

2. Philew.

- you might consider that friendship love, or brotherly love
- Maybe you have been to Philadelphia...that city's name comes from this word...the city of brotherly love...- but this too is a beautiful thing...and it is celebrated many times in Scripture as a way people should relate to one another
- that also is not what is in focus here...

3. Agape.

- this was the rarest word in the Greek language for love but by far the one that is used most regularly in Scripture...
- here's one way to define it – **“A choice of the will to sacrifice oneself to meet the needs of the other person for the glory of God.”**
- each facet of that definition is important...
 - biblical love is a choice of the will...it's not a feeling first...
 - when a married person says, I don't love her anymore, that's not simply a report on the status of one's feelings...it's an induction of sinfulness...
 - that person is saying – I am no longer going to exercise my will in a sacrificial way toward that person...
 - now, are there feelings involved?...absolutely...God made that part of us too, to be celebrated, and embraced, and expressed...
 - but that is not the basis of love, or the primary indicator of its existence...
 - we acknowledge our feelings, and we enjoy them when we should...but we don't live by them...
 - they're the caboose at the end of the train...God gives us the ability to think and choose wisely regardless of how we feel on a given day...
- our feelings are up and down and all over the place...and the other people in our lives will sometimes disappoint us...but we can still practice biblical

love...we can still choose to sacrifice ourselves to meet the needs of others for the glory of God...

B. God is our model and example.

- **John 3:16 - For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.**
- **Ephesians 5:25 - Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her,**
- verses like these help us understand the sacrificial aspect of the definition...For God so loved the world that He gave...Christ loved the church and gave Himself...
- now, let me just ask you to pause and open the dictionary of your mind and check your definition of love...is it possible that you have been operating with a definition of love derived from a source other than the Word of God?...
- and would the people around you characterize you as a loving person?...
- and could it be that some of us should say – I need to change my definition to bring it in line with Scripture...and I need to find ways to sacrifice and meet the needs of those the Lord has called me to love...

II. Make Love a Priority.

- that's Paul's point in verses 1-3...

A. Without it, you are nothing.

Paul speaks of tongues. In this context he is talking about speaking in a different language so that you don't need an interpreter.

- but the point here is – even with that gift operative in the church, if it was exercised in a way that sought attention for oneself...it might be showy, but it wasn't meaningful...it was a noisy gong, or clanging cymbal...Paul says, you have become nothing...
- there are all sorts of people who have all sorts of gifts...but because of a lack of love for others, they either don't exercise their gifts in the church or they do so in a self-centered, showy fashion in a way that cancels out any benefit to themselves or others...they have become a noisy gong...

2. Even for those who possessed the gift of prophecy or knowledge.

- **1 Corinthians 13:2 - If I have *the gift of prophecy*, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing.**
- but it is the same as tongues...even when they were needed in the church prior to the completion of the Scripture...exercising that gift in an unloving way cancels out the benefit of the gift...

3. Even for those who possess the gift of giving.

- **1 Corinthians 13:3 - And if I give all my possessions to feed *the poor*, and if I surrender my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing.**
- some people give but they want something in return...
- they want their name on the side of a building...they want attention or prestige...
- no, giving should be done out a heart of love...
- now, let's plow this the other way...

IF You have shown love, you will be able to name clear, specific examples of sacrifice for others for the glory of God.

- there are many of you who have served Christ in some way in this church this week...

- and they did it sacrificially...
- it wasn't always convenient...it wasn't always easy...and they weren't for praise or applause...
- in many cases, there weren't any immediate results...in fact, they may have sacrificially served and the reward they received was criticism or complaint...
- but none of that matters...because the motivation of the heart was love...
- is that true for you?...

- the beauty of spiritual fruit is that it can always be growing...

- [develop – what evidence is there that growing in biblical love is a priority for you?]

- now, what's the third piece of this puzzle?...

III. Put on Love's Characteristics.

- of course our time doesn't allow us to study each of these in the detail we might want to this morning...
- but I'd like to make 2 general observations and then we'll try to organize this material into a few summary categories...
- 1. there are 15 different characteristics here – 7 are stated positively (love is...) while 8 are stated negatively (love is not...)...we need to think about this from both perspectives...

As you look at this you will notice VERBS - ACTION

- but that just underscores the fact that in the Bible, love is not something you feel, it's something you do...

- now, if all morning, you've been wondering, but how can I really evaluate whether I am growing in love the way God desires...let's organize these 15 words around 3 headings...

A. Loving people have the right view of themselves.

- 1. Don't brag – v. 4**
- 2. Aren't arrogant – v. 4**
- 3. Aren't rude – v. 5**
- 4. Don't seek their own – v. 5**

- now, how does that fit into our overall definition?...
- they are various forms of selfishness...
- there's a sense in which the opposite of biblical love is not hate...it's selfishness...
- and when you choose not to be like that, you are choosing to be like Christ...
- Philippians 2:5-8 - Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, *and* being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

B. Loving people have the right view of truth.

- 1. Don't rejoice in iniquity – v. 6**
- 2. Rejoices in the truth – v. 6**

- it takes massive doses of the truth of the Word of God to overcome all the world has to say on this subject...
- that's why we began with a list of verses from Scripture about love, and then juxtaposed that to various illustrations from what the world says...
- well, we're called upon to live in that world every day – and the only way we are going to have a different view of love is if we rejoice in what God's Word says about the subject and let that be our guide...

C. Loving people have the right view of others.

1. Kind – v. 4

- would that word describe you?...

2. Does not envy – v. 4

- takes 2 forms – I want what somebody else has, I wish they didn't have what they have...
- **Proverbs 27:4 - Wrath *is* cruel, and anger *is* outrageous; but who *is* able to stand before envy?**

3. Patient – v. 4

4. Gives the benefit of the doubt – v. 7 (believes, hopes, endures all things)

5. Forgiving – v. 5, 7 (does not take into account a wrong suffered, bears all things)

- This week, do you have the courage to review that list, and rank yourself on a scale of 1-10 for each characteristic, and then ask someone else to do it on your behalf...???????

DON'T LET THE WORLD SQUEEZE YOU INTO IT'S MOLD

- If you are a believer, you are God's testimony of love to the world
- If not a believer, understand the Biblical definition to understand the Gospel