

#194 “A Still More Excellent Way”

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“And I show you a still more excellent way.”

-1 Corinthians 12:31

Love is the ultimate distinguishing characteristic of true believers (John 13:34-35). Yet, for a variety of reasons, the primary of which is Satanic delusion and deception, love has been rendered as merely being polite, nice, and possessing good social skills and manners. But love is so much more than this. Even the world knows how to be nice to people whom they like (Matthew 5:46). Where love becomes difficult and supernatural is when it requires us to love people we don't like, to care for those whom the world considers to be unlovely, and to truly and definitively value others are being more important than ourselves (Philippians 2:3-4). Too often what the world calls love has an ultimate self-centered component, but love that stems from Jesus in the heart is by nature sacrificial, unconditional, and free. This kind of love is so different from the niceness that the world offers and that the church has too often settled for. Fortunately, God gave us 1 Corinthians 13 to spell out the definition of love in a highly descriptive and detailed manner so that we would see through the lies and peer into the depths of supernatural Christlike love.

Beginning with verses 1-3, we read,

“If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. 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. 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.”

Without love, it matters not how much we give to the poor. Without love, it matters not if we have so much devotion as to be martyred for the sake of Christ. Without love, it matters not if we have a profound understanding and ability to teach the Word of God. Without love, it matters not if we have faith such that we could spiritually move mountains. Some gloated because they had the gift to speak in tongues, and it became a source of pride and misuse in the body. Yet Paul says that without love, these individuals were but loud gongs and clanging symbols. That is a great description of living the Christian life without love. Those in the body who cannot and do not love are noisy, destructive, annoying, irritable, and headache-generating. It doesn't matter if a pastor has such a great grasp of Scripture if he does not love his congregation and even those who disagree with him. It doesn't matter if a person goes to the mission field and gives up all their earthly possessions if they are doing it to impress others or to earn God's favor. Love is the beginning, the middle, and the end of Christian life and service. It is the substance, the outside, the inside, and the whole. Without love, Paul says that we

accomplish nothing of spiritual value and that we are of no value to the kingdom spiritually. If we fail to love, it is all in vain.

Paul continues in verses 4-8, saying,

“Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails.”

Paul says that love requires that we are patient with others, kind, not jealous, not arrogant, and not unbecoming of what people would expect coming from a child of God. Love is not self-interested and self-seeking, valuing the needs of others above its own. Like Christ, it is sacrificial in nature, the culmination of which is a willingness to lay down our lives for another (John 15:13). Love is not easily provoked into fleshly aggression and anger, and it doesn't keep a list of people's wrongs to hold against them. Love hates unrighteousness and only rejoices in the truth. In other words, love cannot coexist in the heart along with sin, and it is bound at the core to absolute truth according to the Scripture. This is why the world cannot love as Christ seeks to enable His church to love (1 John 2:15, John 13:34-35). Love requires a clean heart before God, pure motives, and a love for Christ and His Word. *Things that are done without Jesus as the reason, as the power, and as the end are, by nature, unloving and of the world. There is no ability to truly love without Jesus in the heart.* Finally, Paul says that love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and endures all things. It never gives up on people, it keeps believing that God can change hearts, it never loses hope in the impossible, and it is faithful until the end. It is a powerful, unstoppable, force. In fact, it is so powerful that it cannot fail. There is nothing that we can do to make God stop loving us. People fail us, even professing brothers and sisters in Christ, but God's love isn't so conditional. God's love for us will never be tainted, tarnished, manipulative, or performance-based. His love for His children is based in the fact that we are His children. God must love us because He *is* love (1 John 4:16). He can do no other thing. He is always present, always available, always willing to forgive, always non-judgmental, and always enjoying us. His love will never fail us because He will never fail us. **To be loved is to bask in the security, serenity, and satisfaction of God. To love, then, is to translate and transmit that same reality to others.** Loving others as God loves us and taught us to love is the more excellent way. “We love, because He first loved us” (1 John 4:19).

Paul closes 1 Corinthians 13 by saying, “But now faith, hope, love, abide these three; but the greatest of these is love” (v. 13). Faith is a good thing, essential for salvation and sanctification. Hope is necessary for faithfulness and endurance. But love is the greatest of the three, for, without it, Christianity is rendered unfaithful, hopeless, and worthless. Love, the same love that sent Jesus to the cross, is the quintessential difference maker, that which lights the world, that which takes empty hearts and makes them overflow, and

that which most clearly defines our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. The question remains, of course, “What most clearly defines us?”