

THE LETTER OF PAUL
1 CORINTHIANS
February 3, 2021

1 Corinthians 13

Paul (ever so humble) once more presented himself as an example to follow.
However this time part of it was written in the negative.
He was one who (although very gifted) (if he lacked love) would be of no worth or value.
First item on his list was to highlight the Corinthian favorite – speaking in tongues.
Without love he would sound like an irritating musical instrument.
Other collection of items would be other ways the Corinthians leaned into their gifts.
It was his way of making indirect critique of their self-glorification.
Their extraordinary gifts were emptied of any worth if there was no love.
Proper movement of love started with attention to the needs of other people.
Imbedded within the first four verses then are two convictions –
Nature of love is to seek not our own needs but the needs of others.
In so doing love ultimately makes not only the other person secure but also one's self.

In vs. 4-7 Paul outlined the positive side of love (what love did and how it operated).
Then follows a sequence of declarations of what love is not.
He ended with a string of sweeping claims about love and its all-encompassing scope.
Love is a two-way street that provides a context between each person and others.
It includes that of God and believers (and between believers and believers).
With the support of the others linked in love they would be able to bear whatever came along.

Faith is the basis on which one has hope regarding the future.
How is love greater than faith and hope?
Faith makes love possible so love presupposes faith.
Hope ends when that for which one hopes is finally achieved.
Love is the one characteristic that believers share most fully with God.
And that love is eternal.
Love is the matrix of the life of faith.
Love of God for people becomes the force that enables them to love each other.

Chapter is used often at weddings because it is understood as praising the value of romantic love.
What is often missing is that this text was written for a community that could not stay together.
With that in mind it still works as a helpful text for a wedding!
It is in the difficult relationships that the love describes that needs to be lived out in costly ways.
Love is the absolutely indispensable feature of the believing life.
Without love (no matter how many possessions one has) one is lost.

Question to ponder:

Love is described for believers. What would love look like for unbelievers?
Does love keep score or look the other way? How would we interpret that sentiment?

1 Corinthians 14

Extended passage was meant to argue that prophesy was superior to speaking in tongues.

Prophecy builds up, edifies the community, and serves the common good.

But Paul had to walk a fine line with his argument.

He needed to put speaking in tongues into a proper perspective without denigrating it.

Paul encouraged the Corinthians to steer away from extremes.

Speaking in tongues must include interpretation to result in building up the community.

Speaking in tongues without interpretation only built up the one speaking.

Remember that the problem in the church was not a lack of spiritual gifts.

At issue was the proper employment of them for the common good.

Edification (what builds up) is the test of every action in the life of the community.

Love has an infectious quality.

Love brings out the best in the ones loving and those being loved.

All are built up and encouraged in a most powerful way.

Whole person (mind, body, spirit) were to be placed in service to God.

Paul had a holistic and integrated view of the individual and of all of life before God.

Connection between worship and the rest of our lives was important to Paul.

Worship was to mirror life as it should be lived.

All of life was offered to God as a thanksgiving for his grace and bountiful gifts.

With this in mind then we understand how Paul can call upon believers to pray without ceasing.

It is how we respond to God and have a constant conversation with God.

Our obligation (to those who come to us) is to behave as people who show God dwells with us.

Outsiders should see God reflected in our communal and worship life.

In all we do, we should mirror God.

Worship should reflect the orderliness of the peace of God.

Paul also believed that no one should be left out of participation.

Deference and thoughtfulness of others should be the rule when the church comes together.

Those who take leadership roles need the patience to work with others.

And as for women in the church . . .

We are to assume that Paul was not making a new church policy.

He was reacting to a special situation regarding women at Corinth.

Before he modeled for us that in these cases it was better to *steer clear*.

Questions to ponder:

What do we do as a church to build up our faith community?

How can our lives be worshipful outside of a Sunday morning?

What are we doing that would show outsiders that God is among us?

What are we doing that would show outsiders that God is not among us?

1 Corinthians 15

Chapter is an interesting window into the theological imagination of the early church.

It also gives us a glimpse into its confessional life.

In all of 1 Corinthians Paul stood firm on his own theological and leadership successes.

From his example he made demands on the lives of the Corinthians.

He demanded them to cease their practice of drawing party lines based on those in authority.

He corrected behaviors that fractured the community into those who have and did not have.

He commanded them to avoid idols.

He urged them to resist public disputes.

Paul spoke his own mind, thoughts, and ideas without apology.

Even though he made demands based on his own perspective they were also steeped in history.

In 15:3 – *For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn have received (that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures).*

Paul disclosed that the content of his gospel (not his ethical advice) came from elsewhere.

Proclamation of the death of Christ was a recollection that was grounded in truth.

Paul rehearsed the traditions of the community as a way to unify the divisive Corinthians.

They were united in their shared experience and belief in Jesus Christ.

Passing of this tradition from one person to another was an essential characteristic of Christians.

Several times in his letter he reminded them that he was handing to them what he received.

Proper way to practice Christian confession and faith was to continue the tradition.

It happens through information sharing.

Paul once more wanted them to duplicate his actions.

He linked remembrance with active communication.

In this chapter we hear a precursor to the Apostles' Creed –

Christ died for our sins.

He was buried and he was raised on the third day.

Christ then appeared once more.

Chapter anchors us in clear statements about the content of our shared faith.

It also demonstrates that the gospel is a collective knowledge.

There were more witnesses to the life of Christ than just Paul.

They are all joined by proclaiming the same message of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

Questions to ponder:

What words of faith did we grow up with as a child?

What recollections do we have of the presence of God in our lives?

How do we pass that tradition to the next generation?

1 Corinthians 16

At the end we get an insight into Paul's broader understanding of stewardship. He assumed all believers would be moved to care for others who were in need. Each should give in accordance with how well one was getting along.

What we contribute is literally a matter of grace.

Grace goes around – it comes from God, shared with others, and resounds in his glory. Grace we share is not to be identified with any degree of success or prosperity.

Paul assured the Corinthians that he hoped to have extended time with them in the future. He expected them to help him along his way wherever he was led to go next. He encouraged a proper welcome and support of Timothy. Apollos seemed to have his own ideas of when he might return to Corinth.

His summary call to the Corinthians was to do everything in love. Love is fully love when it is received as love. His closing urged them to greet one another with a holy kiss. They were to show signs of friendship and affection. It would signal the end of their divisiveness.

Questions to ponder:

How do we determine how much of our financial gifts we give to the church?

What do you remember about the closing services of past pastors?



February 17

Ash Wednesday
12 pm and 7:30 pm

February 24 – March 24

Wednesday Bible Study and Evening Prayer
7 pm – 8 pm

April 14 – May 19

Bible Study on 2 Corinthians