



Monday, April 22, 2024 - What is Love?

I Corinthians 13:4-8a

4 Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant 5 or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; 6 it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. 7 Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. 8 Love never ends.

This may be the question of all questions. Love is a hard thing to pin down. There are so many definitions about what love is. It's something you feel. It's something you know when it happens. It's more than a really strong like. It's emotional. It's all of these things and none of these things. How can we know what love is? Simple, God's word defines what love is, what love is not, and what love does. Let's take a look.

I Corinthians 13 is often referred to as the 'love chapter.' The word used for love here is the Greek word agape, which refers to an unconditional kind of love. This love can only come from God. The Greeks had three other words for love, all of which had different meanings or levels of meaning. We simply want to focus on agape today because it is the love that comes from God, redeems sinners, and is to be lived out in the lives of saints. Notice how Paul defines love. It is patient and kind. Both of these refer to the character and nature of God. It also means these attributes are to be obvious in the life of a Christ follower. Next, Paul says that love is not envious, boastful, arrogant, rude, insistent on its own way, irritable, resentful or rejoicing in wrong. That's a long list. It's helpful because when many people in the world define love, these are the lenses through which they define love. What is love to the world is not the love of God. The way the world loves is not the way God loves. The love of this world is the very thing that God's love is not. Notice what love does. It rejoices in truth (that is the Word of God), bears, believes, hopes and endures all things. Love is everlasting, meaning it has no end. To find success in mature Christian living is to build one's life upon this kind of love. Because God is love (I John 4:8) the love of God as it is manifested in the believer can do all of these things that Paul says love does. In other words, as a follower of Christ, your life must be marked by this kind of love which shows itself in these kinds of actions.

Take some time today and give thanks to God for His love. Thank God for loving you. Thank God for using you to love others. As you look over what love is, is not, and does, which one of these attributes in particular is easy for you? Which one(s) are more difficult? One final thought - As God loves you, so should you love you.

Tuesday, April 23, 2024 - Love Leads to Obedience

John 14:15

15 If you love me, you will keep my commandments.

Yesterday we spent time in Paul's epistle to the Corinthians looking at what love is, what love is not, and what love does. Hopefully you have seen how the love of God is alive and active in and through your life. That word active is important. Where the love of God abides, there will be activity. Let's take some time today to consider Jesus' words regarding the relationship between love and obedience.

Where the love of God abides, there is not only activity, but specifically obedience. God expects His children to obey Him. When you are saved by grace, you are saved into a perfect relationship with God, which means we have the capacity, through the Holy Spirit, to be faithfully obedient to the Father. Jesus' statement here is led by a conditional clause - if you love me. If you were to be asked if you loved Jesus, what would you say? Most assuredly you would say yes, of course I love Jesus. Look back to what Jesus says - If you love me, (then) you will keep my commandments. To say that you love Jesus is to be obedient to what He says. I think we all would agree with that statement in principle, but what about in the practical sense? How does your daily life reflect your love of the Lord Jesus? When we apply it that way, many of us fall short. We say we love Jesus with our lips, but our lives may tell a different story. We cannot say we love Jesus but continue in disobedience to His commandments. To love the Lord is to obey the Lord. Not only is this an expectation, but it is also a reason for excitement. God has laid out for you the pathway to a fulfilled life. The fulfilled life for a Christ follower is an obedient life. Here's a few things Jesus says that we can easily obey. Love God fully. Love your neighbor. Love yourself. It's really not that hard when you think about it. If we can nail down loving God fully and loving our neighbors, then everything else will pretty much fall into place (at least that's what Jesus said - Matthew 22:37-40).

How would you describe your relationship with Jesus? If you were to rate your obedience on a scale of 1-10 with 10 being fully obedient, where would you end up? If you're not where you want to be, what changes do you need to implement to grow in faithful obedience? Take some time today to thank the Lord for His loving patience and kindness toward you. Ask the Lord to help you take steps of faith toward greater faithful obedience to Him.

Wednesday, April 24, 2024 - Love One Another

John 13:34-35

34 A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. 35 By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.

So far this week we have talked about love. Specifically how the Bible defines it and how it impacts the relationship between God and us. That's a great start, but there's more. Yesterday we talked about how love relates to obedience. One of the ways we express our loving obedience is by loving our neighbor. Your neighbor may be closer than you think. The easiest neighbor to love is your fellow follower of Jesus. Let's talk about why that matters.

It's not everyday that a new commandment would be given. When you think about it, the commandments are given for our good. That means, if Jesus is giving a new commandment to His disciples, it would be for their own good.

Jesus knew the time was at hand for His death, resurrection, and departure. He also knew that He was going to be handing the reins of the ministry over to the men who were in this room. This new commandment is not profound, but it is purposeful - love one another just like I have loved you. The only way the gospel was going to go forth was if these men loved one another the way that He had loved them. In His absence, Jesus wanted to ensure that love reigned supreme among His followers because He knew that love made the difference. Think about that for a moment - love makes a difference. What set the disciples apart then is the same thing that sets disciples apart now - love. They love God and because they love God they love one another. Jesus goes so far as to say - by your love for one another the world will know that you are my disciples. The Church is known for a lot of things, but Jesus says the primary thing you should be known for is your love for one another.

Who is someone in our church whom you love because they are your brother or sister in Christ? Why do you love them? Sometimes we find it difficult to love a brother or sister in Christ. Why is that? Does that reason excuse us from loving them anyway? How can our church become known the way Jesus says we are to be known?

Thursday, April 25, 2024 - Love the Word

1 John 2:4-6

4 Whoever says "I know him" but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him, 5 but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may know that we are in him: 6 whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked.

I love the Bible! I love to read it. I love to study it. I love to teach it. I love to preach it. I love to learn about it. I love to learn from it. I love the Bible. This has not always been the case. Maybe you love the Bible like I do. Maybe not. It's okay. Today let's explore why a love for God's Word is a make or break marker for love, faith, and obedience.

We've looked at the relationship between love and obedience, or the keeping of God's commandments. Obedience is one of the primary ways that we make our love for God visible and tangible. It is much easier to walk in obedience when we love the standard that establishes our obedience. We know the Lord as we know His Word. The Bible is one of the primary ways in which we can know about the Lord, who He is, and what He does. As we know the Word of God, so will we know God. As we know God so will we keep His commandments, or as we know God, so will we obey Him. If the truth of God's Word is in you, then it will be reflected in and through your life and how you live. Not only do we grow in our relationship with God as we know and keep His Word, but we are also being perfected, meaning growing in Christlikeness. John makes it very simple for us to understand in verse 6 - if Christ and His Word are abiding in you, then it influences the way that you live. Your life reveals the depth of your relationship with the Lord. It will either be shallow or it will be deep. The depth of your relationship is directly related to the depth of your understanding and application of the Scriptures to your life. Reading the Bible is one thing, but when you love

the Bible, you will do what it says.

Take some time today and take stock of your view of the Bible. Do you see the Bible as something that is important or do you see it as something that is essential? Do you feel the Bible is necessary for most days or every day of your life? What truth is God teaching you from His Word currently and how are you living out that truth in your daily life?

Friday, April 26, 2024 - Found Faithful

Deuteronomy 28:1

1 And if you faithfully obey the voice of the Lord your God, being careful to do all his commandments that I command you today, the Lord your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth.

Ultimately, every follower of Jesus has one ultimate goal - to be found faithful to the Lord. This is critically important in the days in which we are living. The world in which we live needs to see faithful followers of Jesus. This means we are to be faithful in the good times as well as in the difficult times. May we be found as faithful on the mountain top and in the valleys. Deuteronomy 28 is a fantastic chapter of Scripture. It lays out the rewards for those who are found faithful as well as the punishment for those who are not. I hope you will take some time and read it in its entirety. For today, we are only going to consider verse 1. Trust me, there's enough in this one verse to keep you going for a lifetime.

There are two responses to God's commands that are listed here - faithfully obey and carefully do. These two things are vitally connected. There cannot be one without the other. As much as possible, though, let's pull them apart to see why they are so vitally connected. We read first to faithfully obey. Obedience first occurs in the mind and heart before it occurs in the hands and feet. You must make up your mind and settle in your heart to be faithfully obedient to the Lord. When the Lord prompts you, may your answer always be YES!. When we decide in our mind and heart that we will be faithfully obedient, then we find it easier to carefully do. The word careful is important. Simply it means to give great care in doing. We don't want to be flippant in our faithfulness. Rather, we want to be careful, deliberate, diligent, and complete when it comes to obedience. What we find when we are faithfully obedient and we carefully do is the blessing of the Lord. Blessing awaits obedience. What we need to understand is that the blessing of God is not always something tangible at the end of obedience. Sometimes the greatest blessing from the Lord is found in the very act of obeying Him.

Take some time today and think about how faithful obedience and careful doing fit into your responses to the Lord. When have you found yourself being most faithfully obedient and carefully doing what the Lord said? What about times when that has not been true? How does that look in your life today? How are you finding joy and God's blessing in obedience? Give thanks to the Lord for every opportunity He gives you to be faithfully obedient to Him.

*This week's devotions were prepared for you by Troy Allen.