

1 Corinthians 13:1-3, "Love Vs. Status", 4/29/18

Inevitably when I'm out in our community and the question is asked what I do, I tell them I'm a pastor at BVBC, they say, "Hmmm...now which church is that? And I always say...what? The one next to the Y...oh yeah! Leads me to think, What would you say ought to be our most recognizable feature of our church in our community? Maybe your mind goes to physical features...Church next to the Y... The spire... multi-colored... Our maybe your mind goes to our programs- children's ministry, student ministry, Good place for families? Our music? Maybe your mind goes to our beliefs- That we preach the Bible... Certainly all of these things are features of our church, some maybe even important features.

But Jesus tells us the one feature that ought to be most recognizable in our community.

John 13:34-35

A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.

Not a building...not programs...not even how much you know about God... Think about that- this must mean that there was something SO recognizable about the divine love of Jesus that if it were to be lived out, the community would clearly recognize this as divine in origin. This was the distinguishing mark of the early church. And Roman society took note. Tertullian, reported that the Romans would exclaim, "See how they love one another!"

Justin Martyr sketched Christian love this way: *"We who used to value the acquisition of wealth and possessions more than anything else now bring what we have into a common fund and share it with anyone who needs it. We used to hate and destroy one another and refused to associate with people of another race or country. Now, because of Christ, we live together with such people and pray for our enemies."*

Plagues, Widows, Orphans... It's no wonder that Christianity spread rapidly throughout the ancient world, even though there were few organized missionary or evangelism programs or buildings. The love they practiced drew the attention of the world, just as Jesus said it would.

I would submit to you that the divine love of Christ is still just as, if not even more, attractive and needed now a couple thousand years later, because our world is starving for it.

Burt Bacharach, 1966- What the world needs now is love sweet love, Its the only thing that there's just too little of...

Black Eyed-Peas 15 years ago- Where is the love?

Certainly social media highlights a deficit of love in our world. On YouTube, watching a cute puppy making these twin babies giggle at the same time... 400 dislikes... Who are these people? But that's mild, the kinds of things that keyboard warriors feel comfortable saying in the comfort of their own homes about other people. Certainly we see a deficit in love in politics. We see a deficit of love evidenced in issues of race, A deficit of love in homes...and yes among churches- splits, factions...

This is the drought of every generation, which is why when a community loves well it will stand out as distinctly divine. Over the next several weeks through the study of 1 Corinthians 13, what is often called the Love Chapter- I want us to ask- How are we doing at loving one another? Would our community know us by the quality of our love? Let's make it even more personal- would your neighbors know you by the quality of your love? What about your co-workers? What about your family members? What about your social media? Facebook posts and tweets?

I'm calling the series **Love Vs.** as a bit of a play on words. Because these loves verses are in direct opposition with much of what we see on display in our world. It's Love Vs.

1 Corinthians 13

If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. ² If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. ³ If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

⁴ Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. ⁵ It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. ⁶ Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. ⁷ It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

⁸ Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. ⁹ For we know in part and we prophesy in part, ¹⁰ but when completeness comes, what is in part disappears.

¹¹ When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me. ¹² For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. ¹³ And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

Today we are going to study just verses 1-3 in what I'm calling **Love Vs. Status**. To understand this we need to look at the context. See 1 Corinthians 13 is actually not in the context of marriage, although we mostly hear it at weddings. That's a nice

application but the context of this chapter is relationships in the church. The church in Corinth was known for their abundance of gifted individuals. Paul tells them in chapter 1:5-7 that they lacked no spiritual gift. The things many people look for in a church, they had it! They had a deep bench of preaching talent. People with great eloquence. They had many gifted leaders. They had church members that could explain the deep mysteries of God. Gifted evangelists. God had endowed this church with gifts of faith and they were seeing powerful displays of healings, miracles...wow- sounds incredible doesn't it?

But there were problems. One of which, the **Corinthian church was measuring their spiritual status on the prominence of their spiritual gifts**. The more public, the more prominent, the more "important" their role was, the more spiritually mature and godly they must be. Chapter 12, Paul points out this problem because two things were becoming evident. The Christians with the most public gifts and greatest abilities were looking down on those who had more behind the scenes gifts. And those with behind the scenes gifts were thinking they were not valuable, and not as spiritual because they didn't have the status.

In the first 3 verses of chapter 13, in a powerful way, Paul directly addresses the futility of even the greatest of spiritual gifts if utilized without love.

Speech Status-

If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal.

Paul says, "Let's just say that I was amazingly gifted with the supernatural gift of tongues..." speaking a language not previously known to the speaker, primarily used for evangelistic purposes... "let's just kick it up a notch, let's just say I could speak the language of angels!" A mean how cool would that be! Some Star Trek nerds like Pastor Matthew wish they could speak Klingon.. but how much more even incredible would it be to speak in angelic language! Whether Paul believed there was such a thing or if it was even possible we don't know, but that's not his point. He says, "Even if I could, if I'm doing it without love, I'm a resounding gong on a clanging cymbal."

This is a fascinating comparison and one that the people would have understood, probably would have even been offended by because they valued this gift so highly. (Demonstrate) Point- the cymbal hit over and over again without the accompaniment of music is noise...love is the true test of spiritual maturity and godliness.

Knowledge Status-

² If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge,

Even if you could foretell the future. Even if you knew all the answers to the universe like...can God create a rock that He can't lift? Or you could fully explain and understand the Trinity. Even this he says is no display of true spirituality if done

without love. Paul says in chapter 8:1- *this kind of knowledge puffs up, love builds up.* We do not want big heads and tiny hearts.

Power Status-

and if I have a faith that can move mountains...

Paul just keeps heightening the intensity and hyperbole- not just words, not just wisdom, how about displays of power. Mountain moving faith. When you pray things happen. People are healed, people get jobs... You are a miracle worker... surely THAT must display the status of your spiritual maturity and godliness. Without love? Nothing.

Service Status-

³If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast...

Surely actions...actions speak louder than words after all, they have to count for some status. What about extreme generosity? A book written, "The Billionaire Who Wasn't" is about Chuck Feeney, one of the richest people in the world, who gave away 99.9% of his wealth to AIDS clinics in South Africa. He didn't own a car and wore a \$15 watch. I love his quote and agree with it, "If you want to give it away, think about giving it now. It's a lot more fun than when you are dead."

What about extreme suffering? Maybe the image of a missionary in a hut in the jungle somewhere comes to mind. Or someone being persecuted for their faith in East Asia. This must count for some spiritual status?

Even the epitome of what we would consider most spiritual, if it's a performance...if it's not out of love? Trillion x Zero still equals zero.

"Without love I am nothing." Your spiritual status is not determined by your abilities, your talent, your knowledge, your spiritual gifts, not even your greatest acts of service. The greatest indicator, measurement of your spiritual growth, maturity, that the Holy Spirit is at work in transforming your life is the love of God in your life.

Application-

Clearly this was just a problem for those primitive Corinthians. We are never subject to the false belief that our talents, abilities, spiritual gifts, roles that we have in the church or in our community are measurements of our spiritual maturity, significance, godliness.

If you don't have a public role, maybe you are better with a tool hands than you are with a microphone near your mouth. Do you ever think that means you aren't as spiritually mature as someone else? Do you tend to put public people on a pedestal because of their gifts?

Do we not tend to put certain status in the church on a pedestal, just like the Corinthians did? Here's the order of spiritual status- Missionaries, Pastors, Worship Leaders, Deacons, Sunday School Teachers, everyone else.

Those of us who have role that are more public, may be tempted to think our worth, or significance, or spiritual status, godliness is measured by how good or excellent we are at what we do.

What is it that you are tempted to use as a measurement of your spirituality? An ability? A position? Who you are married to? How much money you give? A spiritual gift? How much you serve?

Here's what I want you to do- Take that thing, and imagine the greatest achievement or impact you could have in that role or with that ability or spiritual gift. Nate's- If I could preach to massive rooms and get responses like Billy Graham... But I have not love...I am nothing. What's in your heart, Nate? Man looks at the outward appearance, God looks at the heart.

If you can sing like an angel and every hand goes up or people give you a standing ovation...but you have not love.

If you are a great leader and have a ton of followers... If you are always making yourself available to serve, even at crazy hours of the day. If you are a great mom who takes their kids everywhere but do not have love...

You know who Paul learned this from? Jesus. What was the most recognizable and important feature of Jesus' ministry on earth? What it his preaching? Maybe his leadership? What about his wisdom? What about his power and miracles? It was his love. Romans 5:8- Demonstrated his love...

Next week, start by asking the question, "What does this kind of divine love look like?"