

Love: Motive

TEXT: Luke 4:18-19

Words for kids:

SERIES: The Story of PHBF: Who We Are and What We're About

PHBF 11.07.10

SCR. READING: 1 Cor 13:1-8

[summarize series – justice, community, missions/evangelism require love]

Convinced of its power:

“All We Need is Love” Beatles in the war-torn 60s

“Love is the medicine for our sick old world. If people can learn to give and receive love, they will usually recover from their physical or mental illness.” ~ Psychiatrist Karl Menninger (d 1990)

Christians ought to be leading the way. We are God’s dearly loved children. We are the ones who know Jesus would rather die than live without us. We should be the most loving people in all the world, known everywhere for our God-like love. Even if they don’t like us or what we stand for, they should not be able to deny the conspicuous demonstration of our love.

Writing around AD 150, a Christian lawyer named Tertullian described Christianity to the Roman government like this: *“It is mainly the deeds of a love so noble that lead many to put a brand upon us. ‘See,’ they say, ‘how they love one another,’ for they themselves are animated by mutual hatred.”*

Deeds like what? Early Christians were known for rescuing society’s orphaned children, caring for the poor inside and outside the church, even selling themselves into slavery and using the money to purchase another slave’s freedom. Wouldn’t you love to have a reputation like that? “the deeds of a love so noble lead many to put a brand upon us.”

Is love a central characteristic of our church? What are we known for—conservative politics, fundamental doctrine, fine music, careful preaching and teaching? Or are we known for our love? And lest we make a mistake right here and assume that any lack we detect in our church is over there, outside ourselves, in the church in some impersonal sense, let me bring it home: what is the central characteristic of your life? A loving church is a loving church only if it is

filled with loving people. Any problem our church has in this area begins and ends with its members.

But do we really know what it is to love? I don’t believe we do. We live in a culture hopelessly in love with the feeling of being in love, but by and large we have no idea what love really is... beyond that gooey feeling.

“I Want a New Drug” Huey Lewis

Titanic

So what is love, biblically speaking?

1. Love’s necessity (vv 1-3)

Paul picks 5 of the more prominent spiritual gifts—tongues, prophecy, knowledge, miracle-working faith, and giving—and demonstrates their worthlessness apart from love.

Tongues (v 1) – No language, no eloquence, no verbal gifts compare with the practice of love. Beware lest we become more taken up with speaking to a person’s problems rather than loving the person. When this is our case, we are nothing more than irritating (like incessant barking of dogs), empty sound. Have we ever realized that lovelessness on our part could actually repel people from the church and the gospel?

Prophecy, knowledge, faith (v 2) – Think about what Paul is saying here. He’s hypothesizing about fantastic gifts possessed in fantastic measure. Prophecy, which earlier he ranks just under apostleship (cf. 12:28). Wisdom to know all mysteries (truths which we can know only by special revelation from God) and knowledge without limit. Faith so effective and powerful that it can move mountains. But notice what he says at the end of verse two: if I have these gifts but have no love, I am nothing.

Giving (v 3) – Or let’s shift gears a bit from deeds of power and pizzazz to talk about deeds of mercy and dedication. Let’s say that I sell all my goods and even give away my own body. If it’s done without love, I profit nothing.

Paul’s could not have made his point more clearly. Take the greatest gift you’ve got, your most obvious strength for ministry in this church, and

then expand it in your mind until it reaches the greatest proportions you can imagine. Paul steps in here and says, “Even if you DID have that gift in that measure, it would be worthless without love!”

It is easier to be orthodox than to be loving, and easier to be active in church work than to be loving. Yet the supreme characteristic that God demands of His people is love. In opposing that love, the enemy of the church makes some of his supreme efforts. ~ J. MacArthur, *1 Corinthians*

The highest gifts in the highest measure are worth nothing at all if love is absent. But what if it is present? Look at this description...

2. Love’s activity (vv 5-8)

Love is an action. All 16 of these qualities are actually verbs—“love ‘patients,’ love ‘kinds’.... Implies that love is active. Inactivity is unlove. A loving person will behave in a certain way: he will do (or not do). This does not mean that if you are active in the church, you are loving (this is the notion Paul corrects in vv. 1-3). It does mean, however, that if you are not active, you are not loving.

This should be obvious to us from the most well-known text in the Bible, John 3:16: “God so loved the world that He *gave*...”

3. Love’s fundamentals (v 4a)

Love is patient.

- Always used in connection to people (not circumstances)
- A compound word combining the Greek words for “long” and “rage” or “passion.” Implied are the people we need to be patient with: people who incite our rage and stir our passions.

Love is kind.

- Also translated (as an adjective) “easy” (Mt 11:30) and “good” (Lk 5:39; 1 Pt 2:3 “if you have tasted that the Lord is good”).
- Describes the active response that combines with the passive “patient” mentioned first.
- “Make your brothers happy.”

These two words are used often of God:

Romans 2:4 *Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?*

4. Love’s denials (vv 4-5)

Love does not envy.

- Conveys the idea, either positively (i.e., zeal) or negatively, of strong desire
- The idea is that love comes to the place where it no longer has strong desire regarding self.
- Love is not displeased at the success of others.

Love does not boast, is not arrogant.

- Refers to being self-assertive—having genuine accomplishments or qualities or abilities and drawing attention to them, a good old “windbag”
- Love is entirely free from the craving for approval from others. Love enjoys others, not for what it can get from them, but simply for their own sake.

Do not imagine that if you meet a really humble man he will be what most people call ‘humble’ nowadays: he will not be a sort of greasy, smarmy person, who is always telling you that, of course, he is nobody. Probably all you will think about him is that he seemed a cheerful, intelligent chap who took a real interest in what *you* said to *him*. If you do dislike him it will be because you feel a little envious of anyone who seems to enjoy life so easily. He will not be thinking about humility: he will not be thinking about himself at all. ~ CS Lewis, “The Great Sin,” *Mere Christianity*

Love is not rude (“does not act unbecomingly” NAS).

- Refers to behavior that is disgraceful or inappropriate—crassness or eccentricities
- Love learns how to submerge itself into the social context and fit in appropriately

ILL: teaching etiquette, grammar, to our boys

Love does not insist on its own way. (“is not self-seeking” NIV)

- Describes a freedom from preoccupation with self that leads to a largeness of heart toward others

1 Corinthians 10:24,33 *Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbor. ...just as I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, that they may be saved.*

5. Love's Refusals (vv. 5-6)

Love is not irritable.

- Love refuses to become exasperated with people, refuses to allow itself to become provoked

ILL: T.C., my junior high teacher

- But what about when we really do suffer harm, sometimes repeatedly? Next quality...

Love is not resentful.

- Accounting term: well rendered "keeps no record of wrongs" by NIV
- Love refuses to dredge up past wrongs and hurts.
- Love truly does forgive AND forget.

2 Corinthians 5:19 *in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.*

Love does not rejoice at wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth.

- Applies to situations involving someone you'd consider an opponent in some sense
- Refers to refusing to take malicious delight in the discovery of iniquity or wrongdoing in the life of someone else
- The acid test of real love is controversy—how do I behave toward my opponent in a heated conflict?

6. Love's Universals (vv. 7-8)

Love bears all things. ("always protects" NIV)

- Refers to covering things up; noun form is word "roof" (Mt 8:8; Mk 2:4)

- Whenever possible, love shrouds unflattering details and sins rather than holding them up to the light (1 Pt 4:8). One of the ways to deal with sin is to forget it.

Love believes all things. ("never loses faith" NLT)

- Crediting people with good intentions in situations where they could be misread, mentally making excuses for people rather than assuming the worst

ILL: pack of cigs in the glove compartment

- Love believes the best. It accepts people's word without suspicion. It gives the benefit of the doubt. It trusts.
- But what about when the report is proven true? What about when the failure is real? Next quality...

Love hopes all things.

- Being optimistic about people, refusing to take failure as final

Love endures all things.

- A military term meaning to bear up under the assault of an enemy
- Bears up under the hardships encountered in loving people

Love never fails.

- The function of all spiritual gifts will someday cease, but love will endure (vv 8-10).
- In fact, love surpasses faith and hope, because someday faith will change to sight and hope will be completely fulfilled, but love will endure (vv 11-13).

Applications:

How are we to become like this?

1. Don't wait on your feelings. Act.

Let us put to rest once and for all the insipid cultural notion that romantic feelings = love. Love is an action before it is ever a feeling. Does that mean feelings play no part?

The rule for all of us is perfectly simple. Do not waste time bothering whether you 'love' your neighbor; act as if you did. As soon as we do this we find one of the great secrets. When you are behaving as if you loved someone, you will presently come to love him.

...The worldly man treats certain people kindly because he 'likes' them: the Christian, trying to treat everyone kindly, finds himself liking more and more people as he goes on—including people he could not even have imagined himself liking at the beginning. ~ CS Lewis, *Mere Christianity*

2. Ponder long the gospel.

Love does not originate with us. This kind of love for one another is a supernatural work of God. Yes, we must intend to cultivate it, but ultimately it comes from God.

⁷ *Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God.* ⁸ *Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.* ⁹ *This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him.* ¹⁰ *This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.* 1 Jn 4:7-10

Only the love of God can turn us from our self-centeredness, our pride, our envy, our impatience, our tendency to be annoying and insensitive and judgmental. Only the gospel can free us from our bondage to self and turn us to look to the needs of others. Only the life-transforming power of the cross gives us the strength to always protect, always trust, always hope, always persevere, and never fail. Only God's grace can make these changes in us.

When my mind is fixed on the gospel, I have ample stimulation to show God's love to other people. For I am always willing to show love to others when I am freshly mindful of the love that God has shown me. (Milton Vincent, *Gospel Primer*, 24)

If we want to become loving people as this chapter describes, we must become people who meditate upon the gospel every day. We must labor in prayer and private meditation to behold the wondrous cross anew and afresh every single day.

Imagine being part of this kind of church, where we are loved by and love each other this way! What kind of impact in our community! What kind of healing could we bring to one another's spiritual and relational struggles! What kind of sense of the presence of God!

Many have pointed out that these verses describe perfectly the character of Jesus Christ. Substitute "Jesus" for "love" and ponder the beauties of the Son of God, our Savior.

[Reread the passage with "Jesus" in the place of "love."]

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