

SERIES: PRESCRIPTIONS FOR A HEALTHY & HOLY CHURCH:

A Study in 1 Corinthians Applied To The Church Today

III. MAINTAINING PROPER DIET & EXERCISE

D.) ROLES & EQUIPMENT (Offices & Gifts)

“THE GREATEST OPTION” (1 Cor. 13:1-13)

Rev. Todd G. Leupold, Perth Bible Church, July 5, 2009 AM

INTRODUCTION:

Ever notice how the more gifts you give your children and the more valuable they are, the quicker they seem to grow tired of them and/or cease to appreciate or use them anymore? One minute they are so thrilled with their own gift that it's everything in the world and nobody else can touch it. The next minute, they throw it aside and try to take another child's gift instead. Sadly, adults too often do the same thing – even with those things given us by our Heavenly Father.

In the previous chapter, the emphasis was on the gifts which the risen Christ has given to His Church through the Holy Spirit in order that we may be empowered to represent and serve Him to the completion of His purposes. Now, the inspired Apostle Paul presents a full chapter to boldly underline HOW (in what spirit) these gifts are to be exercised if they are to glorify Christ and fulfill His purposes.

I.) THE **SUPREMACY OF LOVE** (vv. 1-3)

- More excellent even than any spiritual gift, supreme among the spiritual fruit, primary over all emotions and attitudes is Love.
- NOT love as a physical sensation, nor friendly bond, but love in it's fullest and purest form as exemplified by the character of God Almighty Himself!
- The Koine Greek in which Paul first wrote this text had three distinct words to express different forms of what we simply call 'love.' The first, *eros*, refer specifically to romantic and sexual love. The second, *philia*, indicates a special affection between brothers or friends. The third and least common, *agape*, is used to refer to a supreme kind of love that is all-absorbing, dominates one's being, and is demonstrated through a self-less commitment to benefit others.
- Throughout this text, Paul uses the term *Agape Love*. Throughout Scripture, this is further understood to mean a divine love – that which is embodied in Christ and only possible for those who through faith by grace are in Christ and living His love.
- **This is NOT a natural love. It is not a type of love that anyone can simply will or learn to feel or live out. It is a unique, divinely-empowered love that is only genuine when it is purely lived (acted) out in one's life! Any kinds or expressions of love that do not conform to these standards are shallow and of the flesh – not the spirit.**
- **Romans 5:5** *This hope does not disappoint, because God's love has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.*
- Essentially, Scripture is here exhorting us: *“In so much as you have (by grace and through faith) been redeemed and reborn in Christ, He has blessed you not only with new and eternal life but the filling, indwelling, and empowering of His Holy Spirit. All of this has been given you as an act of Almighty God's divine love which pours through you that you may graciously share it with others as He has graciously shared it with you. Therefore, since you have this capacity to divinely love others, DO IT! Here, then, is why this is vitally important and how true agape love can be recognized . . .”*

A.) In Speech (v. 1)

- *Read verse and clang the cymbal.*
- Loud and widely heard, but hollow, unpleasant by itself, even grating.
- This was also the instrument commonly used in the local pagan cults to worship the gods who were not really gods.
- Our speech – formal or informal, private or public - no matter how loud, widely heard, impressive, physically powerful or even exquisite and 'spiritual', is absolutely meaningless, empty and alone apart from this divine agape love!

B.) In Gifts (v. 2)

- Even the greatest of spiritual gifts given and exercised in their fullest capacity are “**nothing**” if they are not shared in divine agape love!
- Our gifts, abilities and even the impressive things we accomplish with them are meaningless before God unless they are a true expression of His agape love.

C.) In Actions (v. 3)

- Even the greatest personal sacrifices, if performed with a motivation other than pure, divine, self-less love is meaningless.

II.) THE CHARACTER OF LOVE (vv. 4-7)

- **Agape, Godly love is NOT an emotion but a willful be-ing. It is not ethereal, but practical. It is not a matter of how we feel, but of who we are and how we behave.**

A.) Love IS (v. 4a, 6b)

- The essence of this divine, agape love is simply defined for us, though impossible to demonstrate apart from denying our flesh and living absolutely according to His Spirit!

1.) PATIENT

- Long-suffering. Even to one's own discomfort or disadvantage agape love is slow to judge or react against others.

2.) KIND

- As much as it is slow and hesitant to judge or react against others, it is quick and unhesitant in being a blessing to others for their benefit and without regard to oneself – even and especially in the case of those who do not deserve it.

3.) HONEST (v. 6b)

- Divine love uncompromisingly embraces absolute Truth and acts accordingly.

Agape Love is displaying the character of Christ is all of it's beauty. It is, however, also defined as the opposite of what is fallen human nature – the nature of the flesh.

And so, it is sometimes even more important that we understand what . . .

B.) Love Is NOT (vv. 4b-7)

- A love that includes any of these characteristics is a tainted, poisoned love that is NOT *agape*.

1.) **Envious**

- Agape love is not jealous, does not pit self or group against others. Does not compete for affection or benefit.

2.) **Boastful**

- Agape love looks out, not in. Praises and rejoices with others, not self.

3.) **Conceited**

- “Puffed up.” Agape love does not think too highly of self, nor remain arrogant in the face of that which is ungodly – thinking oneself is the exception. *'The spiritually weak may need to be careful here or avoid this, but not me.'*

4.) **Improper**

- Rude, shameful, disgraceful.

5.) **Selfish**

- Agape love focuses on others over self. Rather than jealousy, it delights in the success, honoring and blessing of others. Rather than focus on what the self lacks, it rejoices in what others have received.

6.) **Provoked**

- Easily triggered to anger, bitterness or offense.

7.) **A Record Keeper**

- **2 Corinthians 5:18-19** *Now everything is from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: (19) that is, in Christ, God was reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed the message of reconciliation to us.*
- Those who live in His love, then, are also to sacrificially reconcile without others and keep no record of wrongs.

8.) **Joy in Unrighteousness**

- Instead, agape love detests, avoids and rejects all forms and expressions of ungodliness.
- The context here emphasizes this in regard to gossiping about and rejoicing in the difficulties or failures of others.

C.) **Love Does (v. 7)**

- Agape love is not just expressed as individual, situational actions. Agape love expresses itself actively and consistently in ALL circumstances!

1.) **Bear All**

2.) **Believe All**

3.) Hope All

4.) Endure All

III.) CEASELESS LOVE (vv. 8-10)

- There is a finite time for everything else, but love is timeless!
- Our abilities, gifts, opportunities & specific relationships will come and go. Agape love is unceasing!
- Illus: Have you ever been on the water in a boat with a large leak? I have! Pastor Ray Stedman explains how agape love is positively like that: *“It (agape love) never quits, never gives up. It's like trying to bail water out of a boat with a big hole in the bottom. The water floods in faster than you can bail it out! Our Christlike love should flood into the lives around us in the same way. Even if people reject our love and try to toss it out of our lives, we keep loving them and loving them until they are neck-deep in Christian love!”*

IV.) MATURE LOVE (vv. 11-13)

- Folks, if you haven't noticed, there is a big difference between how a child understands and demonstrates love and how a mature adult does. Similarly, our expectations in that regard are different for a child than an adult.
- A child has immature love – a love that is lacking, not fully developed, incomplete and at times misunderstood and misdirected.
- I remember that, as a child, I at one point decided that when I grew up I would marry my mom and another time wished I could marry my dog. I was completely sincere and full of passionate emotion and good intentions, but also foolish and misdirected and that type of love was not particularly useful or beneficial for anyone.
- Even the most 'loving' of children are frequently argumentative, ill-tempered, selfish and at times difficult to get along with. As long as they get their own way, they are very loving. But don't give them their way, and they pout, fuss, complain, yell, grab, hit, fight, take their 'toys' back, and throw a tantrum.
- Those who have received and been filled with Christ's love, however, are to put aside these childish ways. That is not agape love.

THE GREATEST OPTION IN CHRIST:

The true sign of the Spirit and of each of us as a Christian is NOT our abilities, gifts, status or even accomplishments. It is above all else a character of godly love such as described here!

Galatians 2:19-20 *For through the law I have died to the law, that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ; and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.*

Stedman: *“We are full of ourselves, we cannot express God's agape love until we empty out the self”* (pg. 188).

Repeat vv. 4-7, replacing “Jesus” for love. Repeat, replacing “Name” for love.