

Faith - Hope - Love

The Greatest of These is Love

By Conrad Barrett

There is no language on earth which offers us a stronger and more challenging word than the one we call love. Most of us taste it in one way or another and yet, many never seem to reach that level of fulfillment which is so deeply desired and sought after. It is like we have put ourselves on a restricted diet of something we really want and need. The real question is “Why?”

The hunger and thirst for true and genuine love are both real and continuous. For some the pain of such deprivation is unending and at times almost unbearable. Just why do we humans put ourselves on such emotional starvation? It is a thought to ponder. Are we really afraid of revealing our honest and true feelings? Or, are we afraid of being hurt or hurting someone else? Have we established perimeters in this area of special energy and are we focusing more on those perimeters and their shadows than on substance? That is a real possibility. Read on.

If love is one of our strongest needs, then it must be understood for what it really is. We all know it is not a “one time application” that does it all. It must be a giving and receiving situation and has to start somewhere. If it never commences, then emotional anemia continues and everyone loses. We also know if this vast and important force is not approached wisely and graciously, then the result of misplaced love can be traumatic rather than concordant. Love must always be associated with wisdom and grace.

Love must start in the heart of the individual and if it is to grow, then the individual must risk the possibility of being hurt or hurting someone else. Sometimes there is very serious pain associated with any expression of love, especially if it is rejected. “Nothing ventured, nothing gained” is certainly a truism here. There is nothing more rewarding, however, than giving and receiving love in a sincere and true way when it is done responsibly. It makes better people and a better world even if we do sustain set backs from time to time.

Sandwiched between two great chapters of the Bible which deal with the working of the Holy Spirit, Paul includes the love chapter. It is I Corinthians 13. For a greater understanding of what Paul says on this tremendous subject, please read the entire chapter. In focus, Paul places love on a higher plane than tongues, faith, and giving. He states that love has behavioral characteristics such as unselfishness, truthfulness, and is not easily provoked and does not rejoice in evil but is full of hope and endurance. This chapter provides a classic example for what we all should be striving. His conclusion of this chapter is a comparison of three great Christian principles and tells us that love is greater than faith or hope.

We humans seem to love differently from the way God does. God loves us without prejudice and always with a forgiving attitude. Sometimes people like to be very controlling and segmented in giving love. It is almost like we want to retail it like merchandise. Loving some and not loving others is a common way of life. Picking and choosing have always been a part of people’s thinking. The Bible gives examples of such

behavior in both Testaments. This can be good for some, but not for others. Think about this.

Both giving and receiving are important when we involve ourselves in any degree of love. To give love is a beautiful and gratifying thing, but giving without receiving some measure of return leads to some measure of withdrawal and unfulfillment. Love is conditional regardless of who gives or receives. Our nature seems to be one of giving because we want or need something in return. God, however, loves us unconditionally and does not demand that we return it. God's love is perfect; our love is not. He is the potter: we are the clay.

Genuine love goes much deeper than the surface. It is not shallow and has no prescribed boundaries. It transcends segmented and shallow love which is sometimes capsulated in families as well as in small circles of people, such as churches and racial preferences. Capsulated love is only a taste of what our potential really is. The fraction is only a part of the whole.

Heart language seems to be the language of God, regardless of what tongue we know and speak. When God speaks to people anywhere and in any language, it resonates through the heart. We all know when we are loved and we all know when we are not. Our heads tell us that. Our dialogue with God, who is our best love example, starts when we believe and receive. It is with our hearts that we believe unto righteousness and it is with our mouths that we confess unto salvation, Paul tells us in Romans. The center of our deepest feelings is the heart and God has always spoken to us through it.

Tongues can carry a message of love but the heart delivers the truth. Many have realized the disappointment of empty and unfulfilling words which have said, "I love you", but the heart seemed far away. Nowhere is this realized more than in more romantic moments when passion rules the heart and mind and true love is lost in the shuffle. Moments of passion if not respected wisely can change us for a lifetime, but true love will last forever regardless. It is never forgotten.

If love is true, genuine and real, it has one specific theme that passion and words may never utter. The theme is "I am responsible" and we never love sincerely unless we love responsibly.

The person who has learned to love truly and honestly is the person who is the wealthiest among us. It is that person who has fulfillment and joy. It is that person who, at the risk of hurt and tears, can say "I do not seek my own." The giver is blest more than the receiver, Jesus said.

Belonging and feeling a part is a basic need for us all. Somehow this is related to love. We need to feel at home in the universe and we need to feel at home wherever we are. Somehow this translates to a feeling of being loved. There are at least two ways we can reach this potential: we can press our own way into areas where we want to be and risk rejection, or we can let others help us get there. It's best when we all work for the other person and as we do, we will find ourselves exactly where we need to be in love and in being loved. Jesus taught us that lesson.

It is true that we cannot make people love us like we want to be loved but it is also true that love is expressed in many different ways. Sometimes those expressions are subtle, sometimes bold, and at other times in variations. It seems to be always measured. There is a capacity in all of us to share love. It extends to animals, too.

Those who seem to be hurt most by some expressions of love are those who become embittered by not believing they are appropriately rewarded for their overtures. “It’s better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all”, someone has said. Those who are blest most by love are those who keep loving regardless. Here is a very good lesson for Christians. “By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love one to another” (John 13:35), and remember no one who really loves will intentionally hurt another.

Volumes have been written about love and its consequences – both good and bad and this article is not offered for any reason other than to point out that love is something of tremendous power and its energy has phenomenal dimensions. Let us reverence and respect it.

Christian Chapel Church
4043 Chandler Road
Muskogee, Oklahoma 74403
(918) 687-1606