

A Picture of the Real Church: Love – 1 Corinthians 13

Abraham Lincoln – “The strength of a nation lies in the condition of its homes.”

So, how strong are our homes today? More importantly, how strong is the love in our homes? How strong is your love?

1 John says that “God is love,” and if that is true, then His followers need to be the best in loving others. We can not be sending mixed messages about love, because if we do, we are sending a mixed message about love.

The world really doesn’t know what love is! Love is a funny word; we use it in so many different ways: I love my wife; I love peanut butter & jelly sandwiches; I love the Baltimore Ravens; I love my jeep; I love my country; I love my dogs; I love the music group GRITS.

To top it off, the world throws a whole bunch of definitions of what love is: Some say that “Love equals romance.” We hear all the time about famous people being in love. Take the incident with Jennifer Lopez (J-Lo). She was married to one of her dancers, divorced him and quickly was in the spotlight with her love affair with Ben Affleck. Now, she is married to Marc Anthony. The tabloids and the news outlets treat this as though it’s noteworthy, because its romantic. Americans eat it up, because love equals romance.

Some say that Love is a feeling. Love gives us the oosie-goosies, or the warm fuzzies. But what happens when we lose that loving feeling? We move on to the next person. Sadly, some folks think love equals the oosie-goosies.

For others, Love means never being critical or negative about another person. This is such a popular sentiment today. Love, so it goes, never takes hard stands; love equals so much “mush”. But love devoid of truth is not love at all; one of the most unloving things I can do is to allow error to be passed off as truth without lifting a finger to stop it. If a brother is overcome by some fault, the most loving thing I can do, according to Galatians 6:1, is to restore that person in a spirit of meekness, and to bear

that person's burdens. These things fulfill the law of Christ, Scripture tells us. And sometimes, that will mean rebuke. Loving rebuke and speaking the truth are at times the most loving things I can do for another person. Love is not mush!

The example of love set for me:

- I will take you only if it suits me for the better.
- I will work to be richer even if it means neglecting you.
- If you are sick, you had better take care of yourself, because I will not be there for you.
- Love is an emotion, so you had better hope that I feel like cherishing you
- Nothing is "until death do us part", so be ready for "until I can't take it anymore".
- God as our witness? Who is he?
- Yeah, I promise for now.
- All that was left of the vows was the word, "I"

I had to relearn everything about love. I had to reestablish what love was in my life – or I knew that my marriage with Sarah would go down the same road my parent's did: divorce.

I want to give you some principles that I have learned that you can hold on to. I am not saying that I am in the position with 6 years of marriage to teach a couple who has been married for over 25 years, as some of you are. I am able, however, to remind some of you of basic principles of love, because I learned some of these principles by watching your marriages.

I also want to say that if you are single, this sermon is for you. Whether you are a widow, or not married yet, we all need to hear about love.

Why should we talk about love today? Because it is God's call for each one of you, whether you are married or not. In fact, the Bible calls love "the most excellent way".

Turn with me to 1 Corinthians 12:31.

THE MOST EXCELLENT WAY: LOVE

There are two things that I want you to catch today in this text. These two principles have to do with what real love is. The first is:

I. HUMBLE YOURSELF

Read with me 1 Corinthians 13:1-13:3.

Ultimately, this passage tells us that we are nothing if we try to make ourselves great. That really we need to love and to get love, we need to be humble.

What does it mean to Humble yourself?

FOR MEN:

FIRST, We are to Love not Lord.

The problem: I was trained that the man brought home the bacon and was to rule the roost.

1. Brought discontent into Sarah's life
2. I was busy telling her how to be better, rather than serving her so she could be better

Being the man of the house is not a position - it means we're the chief servant and it begins with humbling ourselves and submitting to God.

One of the most controversial verses in the Bible is:

Ephesians 5:24-25 - Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.

Men love to quote this verse! We actually think that by telling our wives that the Bible tells them to submit makes our marriages better! Any time that I have told Sarah that she needed to submit, the exact opposite has happened!

I believe that this verse says something far more greater for the men in any relationship: we are called to love like Christ did. How did Christ love?

Christ sacrificed Himself. In order to show real love, we are also called to sacrifice for our spouses!

Sacrifice means to do whatever it takes to make her great

- Give yourself up to her ONLY (be a one woman man) – lustful thoughts can not be an option
- Give yourself for God's purposes:
 - Wrong: God à Family à Job – creates competition
 - Right: God is served by you serving your family and job
 - Think of her as a gift from God that He can be served through

Sacrifice also means that we should be Attentive to her:

- Attentive means that you take care of her needs (felt or unfelt) before she asks.
- We shouldn't wait for our wives to ask us to step in to help. We should be there.
- How did Christ handle the Church's needs? Did Christ wait for us sinners to say "come save us?"
- Romans 5:8 – *Christ demonstrated his love for us in this...*

Another men, need to work on when it comes to love is to Be Willing to Be Weak. What this means is that we need to do two things:

1. Let her be weak around you - Women are emotional creatures
 - The song "Big Girls Don't Cry" is a lie
 - Letting her be weak around you means that you don't try to be the superhero. We need to learn to:
 - not talk – she doesn't need a problem solver
 - just hold her – let her cry in your arms
 - Your partner in life may need to be reminded of God's provision and God's love through you.
2. Let yourself be weak around her
 - Christ allowed Himself to be weak by even dying – why is it hard for us to just cry in front of the one who we have made a commitment to love until we die?

While men need to learn to love and not lord, and be willing to be weak, when it comes to humbling yourself, women have different struggles.

FOR WOMEN:

I believe that women today need to learn to be content. There is a widespread dissatisfaction on the part of many women today. They are discontent about what they have, sad about who they are, and depressed about how they look. Real love, however, trains us to not focus on ourselves and to focus on Christ.

Philippians 4:11-13 - I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through Christ who gives me strength.

When we commit ourselves to love like Jesus, your whole heart changes and the contentment can grow! When you love yourself, then you can in turn humbly love someone else.

Women also need to learn to be Affectionate. I don't know if you know this, but men have egos! We want to be admired by the people around us, and especially our wives. Women should seek to show how much they love their husbands through affection. Affection takes two forms: Words and Touch.

Our words can damage or build up. Most men are confused by the words women use. It is like they use a whole different language. For example:

Fine – this is a word women use to end an argument when they are right, and us men shouldn't say anything more.

Nothing – this means something and you should know what it is.

We need to talk – this doesn't mean that we should have a conversation back and forth. It means that she needs to talk and you need to listen.

Oh, go ahead – this one is a trick. It might be a dare, but not really permission.

Just 5 more minutes – this means she'll be down in 30.

This whole language barrier can be confusing!

We need to be careful how we use our words:

Proverbs 27:15 - *A nagging wife is as annoying as the constant dripping on a rainy day.*

Our touch can damage or build up too. Touch, and especially intimate touch, is a major need in the life of most men. It is instinctive, it is spiritual, it is ongoing, and it can be dangerous. In fact, the Bible tells us in 1 Corinthians 7:4-5 for married couples to not deprive each other of the affirmation that can happen through touch because Satan can run havoc in a person's life.

These things that I am talking about for both men and women really comes down to this: will we have love in our lives.

We need to be willing to Humble Ourselves when it comes to love, but we also have a second thing that love calls us to. If we are going to follow the most excellent way, then we need to align ourselves to what love is. In other words, love calls us to

II. PUT OUR PRIORITIES IN THE RIGHT ORDER

Paul lays out in 1 Corinthians 13:4-8 what your priorities should be. Read this with me.

Paul lays out what love is. Our priority should be to love like this. If this is true, then we need to be sure to keep the love described here in front of us in every relationship we have, especially in our marriage.

- a. Your spouse craves certain things, and you need to learn to speak his or her language. Some crave:
 - Words of Affirmation – 1 Corinthians 8:1
 - Gifts – Ephesians 5:25
 - Acts of Service – 1 John 3:18
 - Quality Time – Mark 3:14
 - Physical Touch – Mark 10:13-16

When it comes to the kind of love described in 1 Corinthians, we need to be sure to find out what they need and give it to them. This means that we:

b. Put others First – especially your spouse.

Put the ones you love before every one else: in your ministry, in your jobs, and even in your own family. Sometimes the kids or a parent come before our spouses, and real love doesn't stand for this.

We also need to put the ones we love before our own desires:

In work – maybe you shouldn't take the next position up because it means more time away from your spouse

In education – maybe you should cut back your hours so that you have more time for your loved ones

In sports & entertainment & the things you enjoy – we need to learn to involved those we love OR give up the things you enjoy for love.

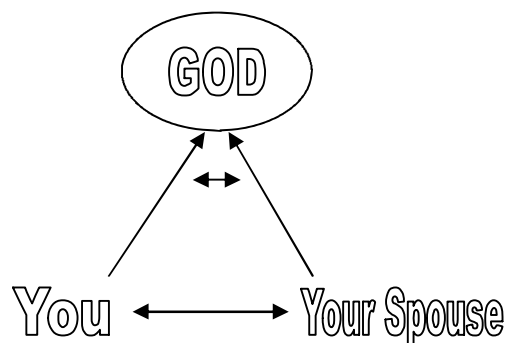
Here's the big test to see if your priorities are right when it comes to love:

1 Corinthians 13:4-8a - Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.

Now put you name every where the word love is and say he/she where it is.

Putting your priorities right means allowing your loved ones to put Christ 1st

Realize that when she does she ultimately grows closer to you – see the chart in your sermon outline:



As the two of you grow closer to God, the gap between you gets smaller!
Allowing her to put Christ first means:

You will see both of you change for the better as you both become more like Jesus – either God will get rid of those annoying habits in your spouse or change you to accept them and even love them!

Ultimately, 1 Corinthians reminds us that of the big three: *faith, hope and love. The greatest of these is love.*

We ultimately experience love in Jesus Christ.

Put Jesus' name in place of love in 1 Corinthians 13:4-8a

So I need to ask you, because of love, Will you...
Humble Yourself?
Set your priorities right?

Maybe it is time to ask God to fill you with His love. He can do it!
Through Baptism
Through Repentance
Through asking someone to pray with you
Through becoming a member in this church

Oh, How I Love Jesus – Favorite Hymns of Praise # 226

Finish by praying with your family:

(If you are a child or teen, pray with your parents, & if you are single, pray for a couple that is dear to you):
For the example that you are to the world
For the example that you are to each other
For couples - That you will always stay faithful to love