

SERIES: LIFE IN THE BODY OF CHRIST

- A. Is the local church still a valid expression of spiritual life? In an age of worship services on t.v., internet, and the numerous books and materials available, why do we need a spiritual family? Is it old fashioned to officially become a member?
- B. *“...All Christians are called to be part of a local church. No amount of time spent in personal prayer, fasting, Bible study, ministry, or any other spiritual discipline can substitute for a believer's involvement in the Church.” Mike Bickle*
- Heb. 10:25 not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.***
- C. A local church has many expressions from house churches to modern day “mega” churches and to everything in between.
1. The mission of the church is the Great Commission: to make disciples by going, baptizing, and teaching.
 2. God uses other ministries (Missions agencies, houses of prayer, other para-church ministries) to work along-side local churches to support in areas of weakness and sometimes to infuse the churches and to bring needed reform.
- D. Everyone is called to be part of a local church. Why do you need a spiritual family?
- 1) You need a place where you can grow.
 - a. There are places in our heart that will never grow except in the context of commitment to a local body of believers.
 - i. People may say: “I love God!” but if they do not love people around them, they cannot really love God.
- 1 John 4:20-21 If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? ²¹ And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also.***
- b. New people who come to faith Christ need a place to grow.
- 2) You need a place where you can use your gifts (both spiritual and natural).
 - a. Miracles, signs, and wonders (Heb. 2:4; Acts 2:22, 43; 4:30; 5:12; 14:3; 2 Cor. 12:12) occur in the context of evangelism or missions, but the main context of spiritual gifts is to minister to the Body of Christ.
- 3) You need to belong to something bigger than yourself.

- a. It's not about you. There is a vision, a mission that is bigger than just one person. We are part of the global body of Christ. We have a mission from the Lord: to worship, to make disciples, and to pray.
- b. The things we do now have eternal significance. The eternal destiny of people hangs in the balance.

I. THE NECESSITY OF LOVE (1 COR. 13:1-3)

- A. Central to both growing and using spiritual gifts in the church, is the importance of love (1 Cor. 13:1-13). The context of this chapter is in the use of spiritual gifts, although the discussion on love is applicable to other areas as well.
- B. Love must be the motivation behind every ministry.
 - 1. The gift of tongues without love is useless and annoying if the person does not have love (v. 1).
 - 2. Without love, even the gift of prophecy, knowledge, and faith, makes the person nothing (v. 2)
 - 3. There is no profit or benefit in giving to the poor and self-sacrifice without love (v. 3).
- C. Spiritual gifts, no matter how exciting or powerful, are useless and annoying if they are not ministered in love. One can move in the most powerful of gifts and still *be* nothing! Giftedness does not equal true spirituality or maturity.
 - 1. Don't put people with strong gifting (spiritual or natural) on a pedestal.
 - 2. Don't assume that you need to earn the right to receive gifts. They are graces. To receive it as a child only way in to the kingdom of God. The way in is also the way forward. It's all by grace through faith.

Mark 10:15 Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it.
- D. Love is a hallmark of the believer in Jesus Christ.

1 John 3:23 And this is His commandment: that we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ and love one another, as He gave us commandment.

1 John 3:14-15 We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love his brother abides in death. ¹⁵ Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.

John 13:35 By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."
- E. If love is missing, then we are not God's children.

Matthew 7:20-23 "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. ²² Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' ²³ And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'

1. When we get to heaven, God is not going to give us a Bible quiz. But He will probably ask us: Did you believe in my Son, Jesus Christ? And did that make you learn to love others? because this is what He is concerned about.

1 John 4:7-8 Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. ⁸ He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.

2. God is all about love. Everything that God does is out of love. Even when God is being just, releasing His wrath, it's to remove all that hinders love.
3. If we do not love our brother (other Christians), then we cannot say we love God.
4. Not only that, Jesus takes it up a notch. Love your enemies. Anyone can "love" people that they like or admire. Do you love the people that you can't stand? Annoy you, betray you, slander you. Can you love them? We can't, but when Christ is in us, we do love them and pray for them.

Matthew 5:43-44 "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' ⁴⁴ But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you.

1 Peter 4:8 And above all things have fervent love for one another, for "love will cover a multitude of sins."

- a. "Fervent" ('ektenes') Literally: stretched. Figuratively: zealous, earnest. It's not of the flesh to love others who I don't agree with, those who sin against me. But God will stretch you to love.

F. Love comes from God. It doesn't come from you.

1 John 4:7 Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God (NIV: love comes from God); and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.

1. Love is the result of the activity of God in us. Love is a fruit of the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:22), not the fruit of human effort or goodness.
2. Open your heart to God's love. Then you will love because He loved us first (1 John 4:19 We love because he first loved us.

II. WHAT DOES LOVE LOOK LIKE? (V. 4-8)

1 Corinthians 13:4-8 Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; ⁵ does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks

no evil; ⁶ does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; ⁷ bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

⁸ Love never fails. But whether there are prophecies, they will fail; whether there are tongues, they will cease; whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away.

- A. Love does not seek it's own: Love does not ask: what do I get out of this?
- B. Love seeks the best of others. Looks to bring out the best in others.
- C. Does not get happy when others fail. Does not get jealous and envious when they do better or get more things than me. Not delight in evil. But wants the best for them.
- D. Love never gives up. I'm with you through this.
- E. This is not a check-list to try to live up to it. The Bible is not. This is a check-list in the sense that if you don't have love, the response is to repent. Ask God to fill you with His love.

III. THE GREATEST OF THESE IS LOVE (V. 8-13)

- A. Most things in this life are temporal (status, possessions), but love is enduring. God is love. He endures forever, so there will always be love.
 - 1. Faith is only needed because we can't see God with our eyes right now.
 - 2. Hope is only needed because we are putting our hope in Jesus Christ who is returning for His church, the Bride.
- B. Love is the hallmark of the church. It is the distinguishing characteristic, trait, or feature of the Body of Christ. When we love, we look like God because God is love. We understand His heart and know God when we learn to love.

1 John 4:7-8 Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. ⁸ He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.

CONCLUSION

- A. Pray for a revelation of God's love (Eph. 1:17-19; 1 John 4:19)

1 John 4:19 We love Him because He first loved us.

- B. Open to the Holy Spirit as He reveals God's love to you.

Rom. 5:5 Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.