

The greatest of these is love:

Text: 1st Corinthians 12:31-13:13 & 1st John 4:7-9

Sunday the 30th of January 2022

Are you ready for a theological and Biblical excursion this morning? Over the years, I have read a variety of Godly commentators: Today, I have been reflecting on the following text, in light of the work of the commentators' Colin Kruse, Leon Morris and Gordon Fee. I added their insights to the early Church fathers, such as Polycarp. Finally, what does the text say to me?

Please don't panic; I will not deliver a lecture suitable for theological students. Instead, I desire to continue giving leadership from the pulpit to the green pastures that are before us.

In short – how are we to experience the reality of the well know passages that some say speak about love: 1st Corinthians 12;31-13:13 plus 1 John chapter 4.

If we correctly examine the words from the Apostle Paul, **faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love** to the words from the Apostle John, **Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love.**

Let us now seek to strengthen further our understanding of the LORD God Almighty and His desire for His children.

Let us pray:

Heavenly Father, we join our prayer with the Psalmist: Your Word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path. O Lord, may the words of my lips and the meditations of all our hearts be pleasing in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and Redeemer. Amen.

Introduction:

The Epistle reading from 1st Corinthians chapter 13 is commonly known as the ***love passage***: As you can imagine, it is often chosen by the couple to be married; yet it is written in response to a Church falling into disarray, of thinking they were better or superior to others, even others in their congregation: The opening words, which are from the previous chapter confirm this reality:

***strive for the greater gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way.
(1st Corinthians 12:30)***

Connecting:

Read:

⁴ Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant ⁵ or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; ⁶ it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. ⁷ It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

⁸ Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end

The above reading was read at the wedding I presided over a week ago. After the passage was read, I asked the married men in the Church – would that be a good description of your married life – and if you say yes – should I ask the married women in the Church?

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If I was to ask you personally and honestly ask myself, are those words a true reflection of our lives? Not just to our spouse if we are married, but to all, we have contact with. This text is far from an ideal or a morality bar; it should be the norm.

Let me explain:

I know we can be all uncomfortable saying we are sinners because we are all good people; basically, we are not that bad: Yet in our Anglo-Catholic teaching, we know we all need the Saviour. Despite our best efforts, we still don't hit the mark. The love passage is suitable for both challenges us all to continue improving and reveal the sin we can repent of.

When we spend time reflecting on such passages, our times of private and generally confession leads us all to become more dependant on the faithful love of God, His grace. We see more clearly the love of God displayed on the cross. When we look at the cross, we can come to God, who has reconciled us to himself.

¹³ And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love (1st Corinthians 13:13)

The Apostle Paul, after he challenges all to the lives the way of love he, cuts to the chase and gives a simple summary of the life of the disciple of Christ:

As the Children of God, we express our faith, our Hope and our love which have all been given to you and I by God the Holy Spirit:

Faith:

The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the foremost. (1 Timothy 1:15)

We know these words as I recite them every time I lead through the 1662 Service. They are part of the liturgical section known as the comfortable words. We have all accepted them as they are an expression of faith. You and I have been reconciled to God. We have faith. This reconciliation came through God revealing to you and I the need to repent and turn to Him, clearly marked out in the baptism liturgy.

Hope

Faith, now Hope. Hope in what? As I have shared during Advent – Hope is not wishful thinking. Hope is the expression of the acceptance of being the beloved children of God. Hope knows it is true but continually awaits its full consummation. For example, if I say my hope is in the Lord Jesus, I hold to his words and his promises -

“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe^[a] in God, believe also in me. ² In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?^[b] ³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also. (John 14:1-4)

Hope is that I believe that Jesus has prepared a place for me and will take me one day. I can not prove that point, and I can assure everyone it is not wishful thinking; I hold fast to that hope Jesus has given me.

Love

You and I have been given the gift of love: we have also experienced the love of God in many ways: ultimately in receiving His Son Jesus as our Lord and Saviour – as the passion and reconciliation work of God was an outpouring of His love.”

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. John 3:16

It is humbling that we have all benefited by the way the LORD acted in love even though the cost to him was so great – the crucifixion of his only Son.

Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. 1 John 4:8

Like the Apostle Paul, the Apostle John challenges miss behaviour in his local Church. He brings out the reality that the work of God is an outworking of his faith, love, his grace. A mark of a Christian is their love. John taught:

Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God

Jesus also stated this very clearly when he said:

³⁴ I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. ³⁵ By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” John 13:34-35

To God be glory forever! Amen

Resources:

David Jackman; The Bible Speaks Today: The message of John's letters.

Leon Morris; Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, 1st Corinthians.

Colin G.Kruse; The Pillar New Testament Commentary, the Letters of John.

Gordon D Fee; the New International Commentary on the New Testament, 1st Epistle to the Corinthians.