

May 29, 2022 - 1 Corinthians 13: 8-13 - “Sacrificial Love Nurtures a Church”
 Characteristics of a mature church

Introduction:

This Memorial holiday is a special time for reflection and consideration to those that paid the ultimate sacrifice for our freedoms. This weekend we remember and honor the lives of those who died that we may live, that we may continue the journey of life. Some of us have known those who gave their life for peace. This peace has exact a heavy toll of human lives and this weekend each of us should wear the insignia of their memory upon our hearts. This nation has sacrificed over 1.2 million lives for freedom both home and abroad. Yet America and the American soldiers are an enigma. We fight wars to liberate, not to enslave. It is amazing what one person can do that can change the course of human history. One person, one act can free a city, a nation, and a world from oppression. Jesus did the same for all of humanity to free us from the clutches of eternal death. He made the ultimate sacrifice to teach us how to change our lives, our homes our country, our community and our churches for the better.

Memorial landmarks and memorial days are not foreign to the Bible in fact we can assume that our forefathers carry on this Judea Christian ethic. On July 4th, 1848 the cornerstone for the Washington Monument was laid in our nation’s capital. Placed within a small cavity was a Bible presented by the America Bible Society. I doubt if a Bible could be place there if it were laid today. Such was the discipline, the moral fiber and spiritual mood given by the founders of our unique democracy. These memorials speak to future generations regarding what made America a great nation. There were those that were willing to give their lives so others would be free. Jesus said, **Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.** This is sacrificial love which is the greatest love. The Bible calls it Agape love.

Barna research indicates a very intriguing fact; that there is a highly significant relationship between the ability of a church to demonstrate love, “Agape love” and its long-term growth potential. Growing churches possess on average a measurably higher “love ratio” than stagnant or dying churches. When you get a group of people together who genuinely believe something, who **practice** it in their lives, and who really enjoy each other, it’s a contagious atmosphere that you can’t keep people away from it. It is this “Sacrificial Love that nurtures a Church”.

I. “Sacrificial Love -1 Corinthians 13:2a:8-10

1. Paul writes in verse 2, “If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge ... but have not love, I am nothing. The Greek word is “*oo/dice*”, **Matthew 5:13** gives us clarity. You can be as brilliant as Albert Einstein or as wise as Solomon, but without love in your ministry, all you know is nullified.

All we know is null and void. Every believer is a minister and is equipped by God to minister love. Practicing agape love is the true test of our faith. It is known today that the average church is too much like a bag of marbles – we scratch against each other and make a little noise, but we really don’t affect each other much. Agape love does what nothing else can do; it has power to do the impossible. To tap its’ powers one must understand the importance of love

as opposed to temporary things... Paul writes, (1 Cor. 13:8) the gifts of prophecies, tongues, and knowledge represent the most highly prized spiritual gifts at Corinth. Instead of seeking these gifts, Paul tells them the most excellent way is love. That agape love is more important than prophecies.

2. Love is more important than tongues because they will cease *pauō*, by itself when its purpose was finished. History corroborates that and once it ceased, it stayed ceased. Love is more important than Bible knowledge because we only know in part but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears (13:10). What is this perfection Paul says is coming? The Greek word translated perfection means brought to its end, finished "complete" or "whole." Perfection can refer to our eternal state as believers, when we will have complete knowledge of spiritual things, the final new heaven and new earth. We won't need to be preaching and teaching, we won't go to school because we will know as we are known and with full knowledge will come full joy, full peace, full usefulness and most important, a love the likes of which we can't even comprehend. For now we need to grow up spiritually.

II All our understanding is obscure (13:11-12).

1. The characteristic of a mature church is to love others and to love sacrificially. **"This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you. John 15:12.**

Sometimes we don't love people as we should because we don't understand why God allows them to do things that hurt others with no apparent penalty. Even worse, sometimes it seems mean people have more blessings than those trying to live for God. So often in this world we ask, "Why, God, why?" The reason is our understanding is obscure. Paul explains it like this: **When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me. (1 Cor. 13:11).**

2. The Greek word translated child means "baby or infant." The word literally means "without the power of speech." So, it refers to a baby so young he or she is unable to speak complete sentences or to articulate thoughts. Paul is comparing our present spiritual state on earth to being like a baby too young to effectively communicate. When Christ returns, we will have spiritual understanding **1 John 3:2** describes this truth! That reality will make our present understanding seem like that of a baby.

3. Paul's point is that here on earth our understanding of spiritual things and of people is obscure because our human limitations make the ways of God hazy. God expresses this truth in **Isaiah 55:9? For [as] the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.** The day will come when all childishness is gone and I will be face to face with Christ and I will know as I am known, full knowledge, full understanding, and perfect communion with our Lord.

Paul continues: **Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known (13:12b).** The Bible teaches we are fully known by God. He knows all there is to know about us. We must realize all our knowledge is partial, all our understanding is obscure and here's the point in the end only one thing will be left...

III. All Christian virtues except love will end (13:13).

1. The characteristic of a mature church is to love others it will be the only Christian virtue that remains' Therefore, Paul writes: And now these three remain: faith, hope and love (13:13 a). In the Christian life, faith, hope, and love are like a three-legged stool. When one is missing, my Christian life won't stand up. Faith is very highly esteemed in Scripture. The Bible state the importance of faith in Hebrews 11:6.

2. The Bible also declares we are saved by grace through faith plus nothing else. (Gospel) But Paul still says love is more important than faith. Why? Because faith is temporary! On earth we walk by faith not sight (2 Cor. 5:7), but in heaven we will walk by sight not faith. Faith, hope, and love are fundamental to our spiritual lives here on earth because all the other qualities, attitudes, and actions flow out of these three. Faith and hope are temporary. There will come a time when you don't need faith because you will have everything in your hand that you believed for. You don't need hope because you will have all your hope realized.

Paul finishes with this great truth, "Now faith, hope, love abide these three but the greatest of these is love," and the reason the greatest of these is love is because love is eternal. The greatest of these is love because love is the only thing that is forever.

3. In a day in which harsh judgment of others seems to be the rule with our cancel culture it's good to remember that love starts with us. The words of the apostle Paul echo here: "**Now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love**" (1 Cor. 13:13).

What a difference we'll make if, when we look at others, we say, "Love starts with me."

It is the greatest because it is the only Christian virtue we need both in this life and in the life to come. The reason is: God is not faith, God is not hope, but God is love. **(1 John 4:8).**

IV. All Eternally love will exist and flourish.

1. Love is greater than faith and hope because love is the very nature of God. If you want to build eternal relationships, share the Gospel with a lost friend. If we really love lost people as God commands (Matt. 22:39), we can't help but witness to them... Your greatest relationships in heaven will be with those who are there because of your witness and self-sacrifice.

2. When you experience "agape love" you'll have the most important treasure in life. The wounds of the past caused by insufficient love can be healing. A broken marriage can be restored, years of hostility and un-forgiveness can be resolved. There is no end to the changing power of agape love. Look around you because it's awesome power and life-changing effects are ever before us. It is this characteristic that nurtures and matures a church.

Conclusion:

Real love is an action not a feeling. It produces selfless, sacrificial giving. In the Christian life, loving one another is as it were' "standard equipment"; it is not "optional." The cross says to our community, "This is how much God loves you." God is the God of love, and we must build true love connection to each other to nurture and grow his church.