

NOTES FROM TIM GAMSTON'S SERMON- 10th March 2024 am

TITLE: "Praying to be a loving community" TEXT: 1 Corinth. 13 v 1-13

Series: How to pray for my church Part 2

Scripture references from the ESV

1 Corinthians 13:1-13 If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. ² And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. ³ If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned,^[a] but have not love, I gain nothing.

⁴ Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant ⁵ or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful;^[b] ⁶ it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. ⁷ Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

⁸ Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. ⁹ For we know in part, and we prophesy in part, ¹⁰ but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away. ¹¹ When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways. ¹² For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.¹³ So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

A church we can be thankful to God for is a church with a gospel culture and a gospel testimony

What do we mean by a gospel culture? The gospel is the biblical message of God's grace to undeserving sinners, which includes every one of us. Through the righteous life of the Lord Jesus Christ and his atoning death, we are rescued from the wrath of God that is coming on humanity. Those who trust in Christ are declared righteous by God and have peace with him.

**A gospel culture is where that shared experience of divine grace is lived out in our life
together as a church.**

However, the grace of God is so much more than the means by which we are saved from his wrath.

Belief in Jesus changes us to become like Christ.

When we live out our shared experience of divine grace, then we become a church that is true to the gospel.

- A church can have gospel purity in its doctrine but have no gospel beauty in relationships, thereby denying the doctrine
- It is possible to say we love Christ but act with hostility towards his people and those outside the church. Thus we undermine our testimony to the world.

Jesus says to us: **By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.** (John 13:35). Where we fail to love one another, we fail to show the world what it means to be followers of Christ.

This kind of love is supernatural, and we desperately need to seek God's help in praying for our church to have that supernatural love, using the passage above and particularly **vv4-7** as a guide.

What will be the result as God answers those prayers?

Paul wrote these words to a church that was deeply divided and had a very poor testimony. They were

- Arguing over who was the best preacher, about marriage and divorce and about the resurrection of Jesus
- Taking one another to court rather than sorting things out internally
- Using their gifts to show off in church, rather than to serve one another, and being greedy at their love feasts so that some were left hungry

Paul showed them three things that offer a better way for the church to function:

Paul taught them the way of love

1. **The pre-eminence of Christian love (vv1-3).** Paul highlights five spiritual gifts, given by the Holy Spirit to enable the church to grow spiritually. The church in Corinth was boasting about these, but Paul tells them that those gifts are not what matters most. Eloquent speech, prophetic powers, understanding of the Bible, great faith and sacrificial giving are wonderful God-given gifts but:

if we do not have love then our gifting is totally worthless

Without love, however well we use the gift God has given us, we will not glorify God or gain any eternal reward.

The pre-eminence of love means that love for God and for others is more important than any gift we have been given. Without that love we will not use the gift for God's glory or to build up his people.

2. **The beauty of Christian love (vv4-7)** We must let the Bible define what love is, because otherwise we will accept the definition our culture gives. A right understanding of Christian love can be applied to just about everything in life. A brief look at some of the statements will make that clear.
- **Love is patient (v4)** (also love bears all things, and endures all things (v7)) Love is seen when a person continues to bear all kinds of injuries from others without grumbling or gossiping, when they continue to help someone who keeps going wrong or serves others without anyone thanking them or even seeing what is done.
 - **Love does not insist on its own way (v5)** Even when a person has a right to something, they give up that right for the sake of someone else so that person can be blessed.
 - **Love does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth (v6).** There is a moral element to love, so love can be shown by not allowing someone to remain in patterns of sin that are destructive either to themselves or the church family. Love does not turn a blind eye to sin.
 - **Love hopes all things (v7)** The person who loves refuses to give up on a friend or brother, thinking that they will never change. They persevere in praying, hoping in God that he will bring that person to a better place.
 - **Love is not irritable or resentful (v5)** The person who loves does not keep a record of wrongs done against them. They do not hold on to the past and allow it to breed an attitude of hostility towards someone.

Despite the beauty in this description of love, it is very challenging.

Who has ever loved like this?

Jesus, who is love incarnate.

Substitute the name of Jesus for the word love in vv4-7, and you will see this lived out in the gospel accounts of his life. This should not be a surprise, since the Bible tells us:

Anyone who does not love does not know God because God is love. (1 John 4:8) When God came to earth in human flesh, he became love incarnate and so we look to Jesus for a living example of what God's love looks like. He is the ultimate example of:

- One who gave up his rights for the good of others, indeed for our eternal good
- One who is patient with people and does not give up on those he loves, though we try his patience every day
- One who could speak gracious words and at the same time speak truth so that he lovingly confronts us with our sin by his Spirit
- One who is kind as we can read in the gospel accounts of his life
- One who bears all things, bearing our sin and our punishment so that we could be restored to fellowship with God

Jesus is more than just an example of the beauty of Christian love

He is the only way any of us will be able to truly love

3. The permanence of Christian love (v8). Spiritual gifts are temporary, given now for the edification of the church

to build us up in our faith and love for Christ and to shape us to be a community that loves one another and those outside the church. When Jesus returns, they will no longer be necessary (v12). Now faith allows us to see Jesus through the Bible but when we see him face to face, we shall know him as he knows us and the gifts will cease but love will remain (v13). We shall continue to believe in Jesus and serve him faithfully, living in the expectation that through all eternity, God will continue to pour out good things upon us.

The greatest of those good things is that we shall love Christ and his people with an ever-increasing love.

Jonathan Edwards describes heaven as a world of love.

- How can we experience now something of that world of love that awaits us?

We need to pray for God to build a gospel culture among us. As we pray this great love song (vv3-7) back to God, we can ask him to fill us with his love so that we love in the same way he loves.

There are two dangers here:

- 1) We can feel that we are already a loving church, and this is true to a measure. That being the case, we need look at how we can do it better, praying this prayer: **may the Lord make (us) increase and abound in love for one another and for all** (1 Thess 3:12).
- 2) You might be wanting God to change the culture just so that people will be more loving towards you rather than changing you to be more loving to others.

The challenge of these verses is this:

- Are you prepared for God to change your heart so that you will be more loving to others especially when they stretch your patience, irritate you and get in the way of what you want?
- Are you prepared for God to change your heart so that you will be more loving towards others even when they steal your limelight, or you despair of them ever changing?

**If God moves to shape us to be a church with a gospel culture,
a church that loves against all the odds and where Christ's life is seen
then the Lord will need to do surgery on all of us.**

- a) **We need to be more self-aware.** We are not good at seeing ourselves as others see us. In many areas of our life, we either have too high or too low an opinion of ourself.

We need to be put into situations where our love is tested

The Lord brings people into our lives who we find difficult in various ways. How we respond will reveal what kind of love we have. Is it a superficial love that loves simply because people meet our own requirement to be loved or do we have the supernatural love of Christ poured into our heart?

We need to check our response against the song of love.

Then we need to dig deeper, asking God to reveal the heart attitude under our response.

- Was my angry response a result of pride or fear?
- Am I irritable towards someone because of a deep-rooted selfishness?

- Is my impatience due to my heart loving something other than Christ and someone stopped me having it?

The kind of culture we long for happens only as we experience change at the deepest level of our hearts.

b) We need humility to confess our failures. Confession of sin to those we have failed to show love to (as well as to Christ) is really important in church life. If the church has a real gospel culture, then

Confession of sin to one another will not be as daunting as it seems.

Gospel culture is a culture where we all know we need God's grace, where we experience God's grace

and, therefore, where we are willing to share God's grace with others

When you confess sin to someone you have wronged, you are confessing to another desperately needy sinner who is in no position to judge you.

Jesus Christ is the only judge and one day we will all stand together before him.

Confession humbles us and removes the kind of judgementalism that pride creates.

- Confessing sin to a person who is aware of their own need of God's grace will only ever be met with forgiveness, grace and a desire to point you to Christ, through whom we all experience the grace of forgiveness and real change

c) We need faith to experience the transforming power of the Gospel by the Spirit.

Christ is the perfect embodiment of love, and the work of God's Spirit is to form Christ in you.

He does that as you trust in the gospel of Christ and learn to apply it to your life.

Imagine someone is trying your patience and your initial response is unloving - open verbal anger, passive aggression or gossiping about that person. You need to take time to think about your response:

- Ask the Lord to reveal the heart attitude behind it, to show you what is causing you to feel this way.
- Confess that to the Lord, who knows your heart anyway, and ask him to show you in his word how Christ meets your need in that area.

The Lord might reveal to your heart how he has been patient with you, though you have continually given him reason to be angry with you. He loves you and he has not written you off, despite all your failures.

As you meditate on the truths of the gospel, so the Spirit will begin to change you, softening your heart towards the person who was trying your patience. The Spirit will help you to have a conversation with them and give you the humility to confess how you have wronged them.

You do all this in the presence of Jesus – that is how change happens

We are welcomed into a relationship with the living God, who shows us what true and authentic love is. The world is desperately longing for that kind of love, but seeking it in the wrong places.

- Let us pray for the Lord to build a gospel culture that is highlighted by growth in our love for one another
- Let us intentionally work through our failure to love as Christ loves us
- Let us seek this pre-eminent grace above any other gift so that the world comes to know and see that God is love

May we be a people who show to the world what true love is like and where true love is found.

**Lord, help us to love one another in a way that is patient and kind
is not proud and self-seeking, keeps no record of wrongs
rejoices with the truth,
trusts, hopes and perseveres.**

(taken from **5 things to pray for your church** by Rachel Jones)