

Wednesday Night BIBLE STUDY

Wednesday, February 5, 2014 – First Baptist Church Buda
Midweek Prayer Meeting & Bible Study

BUILDING, BUILDING, BUILDING **“Building Stronger Church Through Stronger Relationships”** **A Key Ingredient... Love and Acceptance** *1 Corinthians 13:1-7*

Perhaps one of God’s most key characteristics is “love”... real love, agape love, an unconditional love, a love that was willing to give it’s all when what it was being given for was not willing to give at all. Such is God’s love. John says it in simple words in 1 John 4:16, “God is love...” Those who belong to Him, believers (Christians), are to reflect that love. 1 John 4:16 says in its entirety, “And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him.” And in 1 John 4:19, “We love because He first loved us.” In other words, God is love and we are to reflect His love as His children. John even goes further in 1 John 4 by saying such things as “If anyone says, I love God, yet hates his brother, he is a liar...” (v.20), and “Whoever loves God must also love his brother” (v.21). So we might say that one of the most key and essential ingredients that should characterize and be found in the church... a body of believers, is “love”... real love, agape love, an unconditional love.

QUOTE - “People are hungry for acceptance, love and friends, and unless they find them in the church they may not stay there long enough to become personally related to Jesus Christ. People are not persuaded, they’re attracted. We must be able to communicate far more by what we are than by what we say.” - Marion Jacobsen, “Saints and Snobs,”

What do you think Marion Jacobsen is saying with this quote? Is it accurate or not? Do you agree or disagree? Why or why not? You may record your response below: _____

Again, Marion Jacobsen’s quote in “Saints and Snobs” says, “People are hungry for acceptance, love and friends, and unless they find them in the church they may not stay there long enough to become personally related to Jesus Christ. People are not persuaded, they’re attracted. We must be able to communicate far more by what we are than by what we say.” The world is in desperate need of the magnetic appeal created by authentic love – “agape” in action. This is

what must make up the church, and what will make a church grow and build. Let's look at the "how" of love and acceptance... a key ingredient to building, building, building strong churches with strong, growing relationships.

I. THE PRIORITY OF LOVE (1 Corinthians 13:1-3)

1. **Conditional Statements... "If I.."** – This conditional appears five times and give actually give six surprising weak substitutes for genuine love in verses 1-3

Six Weak Substitues for Love:

- (1) **"If I speak with the tongues of men and angels..." = Spirituality** - Have you ever known those who always seem to make you feel like they were spiritually superior to you, more pious? Ask yourself what might have been missing?
- (2) **"If I have the gift of prophecy..." = Religion** - Have you ever known those who were very religious and devout... so religious and devout that they cut themselves off from other people? Ask yourself what might have been missing?
- (3) **"If I can fathom all mysteries and have all knowledge..." = Knowledge** - Have you ever known those who knew all about the Bible, very smart and learned about Scripture, many be knew how to answer all the questions, but when it came to relating to others they couldn't? Ask yourself what might be missing?
- (4) **"If I have great faith to move mountains..." = Faith** - Have you ever known those who may have had a lot of faith, they would perhaps want to step out on faith, but when they encountered those who had some reservations or who felt like we might need to wait, they would get angry? Ask yourself what might be missing?
- (5) **"If I give all my possessions to the poor..." = Benevolence** - Have you ever known those who like to give and give a lot, they didn't mind others knowing that they were giving, or maybe they made sure that somehow others new what they gave, or maybe they gave, but complained about giving? Ask yourself what might be missing?
- (6) **"If I give my life in martyrdom..." = Sacrifice** - Have you ever know those who were constantly serving and giving, and doing things for others or for the church, busy all the time... so busy doing in fact that they were tired, burned out, and in subtle ways let others know? Ask yourself what might be missing?

NOTE: Surprisingly great churches are not built on great spirituality, great religious acumen and insight, great knowledge, great faith alone, great benevolence, nor great sacrifice. While these are important without the missing ingredient they will always ring hollow and fall short. Do you think this ever happens in churches? What are the results?

2. **Repetitious Statements...** “... **But do not have love...**” – Three times in the first three verses this statement appears “... **but do not have love...**” This three time repetition sounds similar to the three time repetition that Jesus gave to John in the last chapter of John’s gospel (**READ: John 21:15-17**) Remember that Peter had been one of Jesus closest followers and disciples. He was one of the inner circle disciples with James and John, but when Jesus was facing his darkest hour Peter had denied Jesus not once but three times. Peter’s three fold denial is here covered in Jesus’ reinstatement of Peter’s affirmation of his love for Christ repeated three times. From this we may learn something about the priority of love.

3 Truths Learned from 3 Repetitious Statements:

- (1) **Real love is not shown by our religious following and seeming devotion, this can be fleeting** – Don’t think it can’t! I’ve seen the most religious of men and women fall and lose their way. If it can happen to Peter it can happen to you! And Paul mentions all of these highly public, visible religious expression and tells us they are not enough and implies they can be absent of love.
- (2) **Real love is not negated by our faults and failings, because we always have one who will keep on loving us no matter what (*that is not a license, but a humbling truth*)** – This is important to know, because it inspires us to love deeper, like God and Jesus love... to be motivated to a higher love that love no matter. Jesus loved Peter unconditionally, even when he was denying Him. That is why He reinstated Him. John 21 is a love act by Jesus on Peter behalf. That is how we are to operate within the fellowship. Also remember that the first 3 verses are ways that we try to love God, but they ring hollow compared to His love and are meaningless apart from His divine love.
- (3) **Real love is not so much in what we say, but what we do and not so much in what we do, but how we do it (*what is behind it... love*)** – In other words, “Peter don’t say you love me. You did that once and denied knowing me. Peter show you love. Show you love me by loving and caring for others.” Listen, don’t just be spiritual, religious, knowledgeable, show faith, be benevolent, be sacrificing... be loving. Show why you are those things because of love and through those things express love. That is truly fellowship building.

II. THE MEANING OF LOVE (1 Corinthians 13:4-7)

1. **Working Definition of Love** – “Seeking the highest good of the other person; doing what is best for them.” – Charles Swindol

The world says, “*Love is never having to say your sorry!*”-*Love Story* But love must always be saying “I’m sorry!” “Please for give me!” “I was wrong!” Sometimes love even has to say “I’m sorry” when it wasn’t your fault because that is just what love does.

The world say, “*Love is a many splendored thing!*”–*Movie* But sometimes love is not splendored, glorious or brilliant. Sometimes it’s messy and difficult and painful and many times it hurts and is quite often hard. That is what love does. The world has a very mixed up notion of love.

The world’s mixed up definition of love? – Below list some of the things that might describe how the world today defines love:

1. **Love is conditional** – “I will love you if...”
2. **Love is me oriented** – “What is in for me...”
3. **Love is fickle** – “I love lots of things and a lot of people and if it doesn’t work out I will find someone or something else to love.”
4. **Love is misunderstood** – “I love things, hotdogs, baseball and apple pie...”
5. **Love is sex** – “Love is sex and sex is love... we even call it ‘making-love’ Sex is an expression of love between two married and committed people, but sex is not necessarily love.

In the ancient Greek speaking world, love could be a pretty confusing thing, like it is today, so the Greeks had 4 different words to describe “love.” Each of these 4 words was a different kind of love.

4 Kinds of Love in the Greek:

- (1) **Storge = Family love** – “Storge” love referred to love within a family, parental love between a parent and child, or the love bond that existed among kin.
- (2) **Phileo = Friend love** – “Phileo” is literally “brotherly love,” the love that exist between close friends... even best friends. The city of Philadelphia is known as “The City of Brotherly Love” and that pin name from the root meaning of the city’s name coming from this Greek word, “Phileo”... Philadelphia.
- (3) **Eros = Romantic Love** – “Eros” is the love between a husband and wife, the romantic attraction that two people feel when they are drawn together and love is ultimately consummated in “eros” love. Unfortunatley this beautiful Greek word has been corrupted today and used by the Pornography Industry as a designation for their business “Erotica.” So when we see the wore “Erotic” we immediately think of something dirty. Originally this was the word use to describe what a couple in love felt for each other... something beautiful.
- (4) **Agape = Divine Love** – This was the highest form of love in the Greek language. It was not used (maybe rarely) by the ancient Greek and not a words used in Classical Greek, but almost exclusively used in New Testament in Koine Greek...

the common Greek of Jesus day (the New Testament was not written in Classical Greek but Koine Greek, “Koine” means common) This words denoted a type of love unknown to man... divine love. It was a love that was “unconditional.” It is a truly committed kind of love, an always kind of love, and unchanging love. It is a love that says, “No matter what you do I am going to keep loving you!” This is the kind of love that Scripture tells us that God has for us, that He demonstrates for us through Jesus, and it is the kind of love that we are called to exhibit and practice toward others. It is this kind of love that is characteristic of genuine “fellowship.” And you can see why it is so dangerous... it is unconditional!

NOTE: *“Agape” is the kind of love spoken of in 1 Corinthians 13, therefore as 1 Corinthians 13 describes this kind of love we are to pay close attention because this is what we are to exhibit in building true, genuine, koinonia fellowship.*

2. Fifteen Worship Characteristics of Love –

- (1) **Patience (v.4)** –This term refers to being long-tempered, and is always directed toward people. On the other hand, “endurance,” though similar, is always directed toward things and circumstances.
- (2) **Kindness (v.4)** – Kindness can be described as “helpful, friendly, free from petty criticism.”
- (3) **Not jealous (v.4)** – To be jealous is to “burn with envy.” Put another way, jealousy is “the inordinate passion to possess what I already have.” “I am jealous. That belongs to me! Envy, on the other hand is different. Envy is “the inordinate passion to have what another person possesses.” “They have more than me and I want I want it.” Jealousy want to keep, while envy wants to have.
- (4) **Not bragging (v.4)** – Agape does not act or play the part of a braggart. The term can easily be used in reference to intellectual or spiritual pride.
- (5) **Not arrogant (v.4)** – Arrogance blows, is inflated, puffed up, and is proud and haughty. Bragging is something we do, while arrogance is something we are.
- (6) **Not unbecoming (v.5)** – At the heart of this word is the idea of scheming. It refers to shape, form and outward appearance. The outward appearance of love must not be tactless or rude.
- (7) **Not self-seeking (v.5)** – Literally, agape “does not seek the things of itself,” which includes its own rights, ways and interest. It puts the rights, interest of others ahead of it’s own.

NOTE: *Genuine fellowship must have love if it is to live. Without love, fellowship is destroyed... and total death results*

- (8) **Not provoked (v.5)** – Two original word shape the thought... (1) “to sharpen” (2) “beside.” Here’s the idea... “not sharpened beside others, not irritated.” Love does not permit the one who is sharp and abrasive to affect it. Effort is implied in the characteristic.
- (9) **Forgiving (v.5)** – “Love does not take into account a wrong suffered.” An accounting suggests the thought of making entries in a ledger. Love does not keep score, but forgives and erases from the ledger.
- (10) **Righteous loving (v.6)** – “Love does not rejoice in unrighteousness.” Agape finds no pleasure in, nor sympathy with wrongdoing, but loves “right-relatedness” both with God and others.
- (11) **Truth loving (v.6)** – Love and truth are inseparable twins. When love is present, there is no room for hypocrisy. Love bears the responsibility of searching out the truth, and not responding to, nor spreading hearsay.
- (12) **All bearing (v.7)** – To “bear” has the idea of covering over, so as to protect or shield. Real love is durable, and withstands the blows and attacks of others.
- (13) **All believing (v. 7)** – This is not being gullible, but putting aside suspicion... giving the benefit of the doubt without skepticism.
- (14) **All hoping (v.7)** – This agape quality has to do with anticipating the very best in the other person.
- (15) **All enduring (v.7)** – Being determined and refusing to quit also characterizes agape

III. THREE POSSIBLE RESPONSES

3 Possible Responses:

1. **“I’m never going to be unlovely again”** – *Evaluation:* Totally unrealistic. Every effort of the flesh is bound to fail.
2. **“I have tried and tried, but failed. It’s not worth the risk”** – *Evaluation:* Refusal to try is disobedience. *“Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves.” (Romans 12:10)*
3. **“I admire these qualities, want them, but cannot produce them in my strength”** – *Evaluation:* This is the only proper response. The key to such loving is a commitment of the mind and heart to the Holy Spirit’s control. *“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.” (Galatians 5:22-23)*

NOW ITS YOUR TURN...

Pray about it... Spend some time in prayer specifically for an attitude of love and acceptance. Ask God to show you the weak spots in these areas, and ask for His strength for improvement.

Read about it... How do you measure up to 1 Corinthians 13:4-7? Try this brief exercise and see. Read aloud verses 4 through 7 of 1 Corinthians 13, substituting your name for the word “love” (i.e. Bill is patient, Bill is kind etc.) How does it sound? Which phrases are true and which phrases could stand some improvement?

Act upon it... Are you allowing God to produce in you this “magnetic appeal” created by authentic agape? Are there people who haven’t seen this love in you? If so, write down a name of or two. Determine to show them agape through your life in the next 7 days in some w