

Evotional – 13 July 2014 – 1 Corinthians 13:1-13

Spiritual gifts used in love

1. Love is active (v4-7)

'I feel it in my fingers, I feel it in my toes, Love is all around me, And so the feeling grows.'

We often think of love as a feeling. But Paul's emphasis is on what love does (or avoids doing) – see eg the Message version:

Love never gives up. Love cares more for others than for self. Love doesn't want what it doesn't have. Love doesn't strut, Doesn't have a swelled head, Doesn't force itself on others, Isn't always "me first," Doesn't fly off the handle, Doesn't keep score of the sins of others, Doesn't revel when others grovel, Takes pleasure in the flowering of truth, Puts up with anything, Trusts God always, Always looks for the best, Never looks back, But keeps going to the end.

Love is not soft and sentimental, it is strong and reliable. It is totally unselfish. It is not about me but about others.

God is love, and Jesus shows us what God is like – all those words about love are true of Jesus.

But this passage was written in the context of what church should be like. We are not perfect but God's Spirit is at work here:

Question 1: Think of when you have seen love like this at Bessels, and give thanks that God's Spirit is at work in us.

2. Love is crucial (v1-3)

'All you need is love, all you need is love, All you need is love, love. Love is all you need.'

Love is an action but it's not just about what we do! Paul says to the Corinthians (and to us) 'think of the things you most admire and value in church'. Then he says (and this would have shocked them): it's not the action itself but what's inside us. It is a feeling after all, but not in a sentimental way – but the motivation and attitude.

Paul says that the ecstatic utterance may be genuine, the prophetic word may be spot on, the act of faith may be awesome, the sacrifice may be worthwhile, what we do here in church may be excellent ...

... but nevertheless this really doesn't matter in comparison with whether love is present or absent. Without it ... nothing, emptiness, a noisy racket.

When I exercise a God-given gift but am not motivated by love, I am a clanging noise, I gain nothing, I am nothing. It's a warning.

Question 2: Think of when you have done something for God's kingdom, but were not motivated by love, and ask for God's forgiveness.

3. Love is eternal (v8-13)

'I can't stop loving you, So I've made up my mind, To live in memory, Of such an old lonesome time.

I can't stop wanting you, It's useless to say, So I'll just live my life, In dreams of yesterday.'

There is something romantic about eternal love. But in this world, eternal love is often cruel and tragic. Christian love can look forward eternally, not back. In fact this is Paul's killer blow to the Corinthians' wrong attitudes to spiritual gifts: they were convinced that God's kingdom had already fully arrived – that we are already practically in heaven. But actually, the spiritual gifts they so much cherished are not only empty without love, but also (unlike love) they are temporary. One day:

- We will no longer want tongues to express our deepest longings, we will no longer need prophets to explain and interpret and apply God's word, we will no longer have to try to work out God's purposes.
- We will move out of the shadowlands, the frustrations and imperfections of this world.
- Everything about our experience of life on earth and of being the church will undergo transformation – our worship, understanding, faith and hope.
- The apostles, prophets, teachers, miracle-workers, healers, administrators and tongue-speakers will all become redundant in the sense in which their work is currently carried out.
- Our failed attempts at love, our hurts at the failures of others to love us (even here in the church) will disappear.
- We will see face to face. And when we come face to face with God, what will be our overwhelming experience?

LOVE.

In the meantime, we are eagerly and passionately engaged in learning to love, in having concern and respect for the other above the self, in being increasingly grounded in the loving nature of God as revealed in Christ.

Love is not the consolation prize if you don't have the gift of healing or tongues, or you can't speak in public or play a musical instrument or you're too old to jump around. Love is the real thing. Without it we are nothing.

Question 3: Do you really believe that last paragraph?

Question 4: Look back at v4-7, and think of one aspect of love you are not good at, and ask for the Holy Spirit to fill you with love.

Finish, then, thy new creation; pure and spotless let us be. Let us see thy great salvation perfectly restored in thee; changed from glory into glory, till in heaven we take our place, till we cast our crowns before thee, lost in wonder, love, and praise [but particularly love!]