

October 15, 2017

The Most Excellent Way

"I always thank God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus. For in him you have been enriched in every way—in all your speaking and in all your knowledge—because our testimony about Christ was confirmed in you. Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed." I Corinthians 1:4-9

It is not just about being religious. In his first letter to the believers in Corinth the Apostle Paul had much to criticize. It is clear, I think, that the key problem these believers had, was their lack of a deep and honest love for one another. This missing ingredient allowed them to treat each other badly in nearly every way. Not much has changed in our time. Many of us focus on carefully observing the rules and regulations of our religion but in the end we fail to treat one another the way we should.

The Apostle will make it clear in our context for today, that being religious, even if we do it very, very well, means nothing if we do not demonstrate our love for one another in our lives. He writes, *"If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor, and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing."* (13:1-3)

The entire central focus of our walk as believers is ultimately on this one thing. It is all about how well we honestly practice our love for one another in our daily lives. No matter how well we do all of the other things that go with our religious beliefs, failing to love others still means we have done nothing.

While we talk about loving others it is difficult, at best, to measure the depth of our love in practice, so Paul defines it very clearly for us. He says, *"Love is patient; love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails."* (13:4-7)

The Apostle would teach us, I think, that these are the behaviors that constantly define the reality of our faith. Note them again. **Love is...**

Patient and Kind: Long-suffering is not something we are working on, it is something we are choosing to give to others. Kindness is not something we would like to do; it is who we are.

Not envious, boastful, or filled with pride: Humility in our every day life is key to our capacity to love others. When I see myself as no better than anyone else then in that humility I can love others. Pride and humility cannot co-exist.

Not rude, self-seeking or easily angered: The mark of those who have not discovered and do not practice love is demonstrated in their rudeness, selfishness, and belligerence.

Not keeping a record of wrongs: We sin against others all of the time just as they sin against us. We expect and often demand that others 'cut us some slack'. As those who demonstrate the love of Christ we need to be as quick to forgive others as we would want them to be in forgiving us.

Rejoicing in the truth: We nearly always know the difference between good and evil. In our culture it is easy to get sucked into delighting in the evil. As those who bear the love of Christ we need to participate and condone only the truth; only the good.

Constant: Love constrains us to protect the feelings of others; to give the gift of trust over and over again; to never give up hoping for the best from and for others, and to never give up on choosing to love.

Victorious: Ultimately love always wins. It never fails although we may fail it. Day by day and moment by moment we have the opportunity in every single relationship to choose to love, or to not choose to love. In truth we know what we need to do, but the doing is sometimes very hard. Love never fails when you and I never fail to love.

