

BACK TO BASICS

INTRODUCTION

1 Corinthians 13:1-7 (NLT) If I could speak all the languages of earth and of angels, but didn't love others, I would only be a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. ² If I had the gift of prophecy, and if I understood all of God's secret plans and possessed all knowledge, and if I had such faith that I could move mountains, but didn't love others, I would be nothing. ³ If I gave everything I have to the poor and even sacrificed my body, I could boast about it; but if I didn't love others, I would have gained nothing.

- **“but if I didn't love others, I would have gained nothing.”**

For just over a year now, our Mission Statement has been “Flourishing in faith, growing in love”. In our vision statement, we also speak of love. These sound very nice and they are great statements, but they are really not worth much unless we are living them out. Just like in the skit, It's pointless saying “We're flourishing in faith” or “we're growing in love” if we don't have a love that is growing more and more and a faith that is flourishing.

Today, I would like to look at what it means to “Grow in love”. I believe we need to go “back to the basics”. Are we doing the basic things right to ensure that we are growing in love?

There are 4 areas where I would like us to focus on:

- What is love?
- How is love evidenced in our lives?
- Things that influence our ability grow in love.
- Practical application of this characteristic of growing in love.

MESSAGE

WHAT IS LOVE?

1 John 4:8 (NLT) But anyone who does not love does not know God, **for God is love.**

God is love – He is the beginning and ending, the Alpha and Omega of everything that is love.

- He created love.
- He gives us His love.
- He has placed in us the ability to love.

The Bible teaches us that we are to imitate Christ – we must grow to be like Him.

- If He is love and we are growing to be like Him then we must be...
"Growing in love".

Paul thanks God for these characteristics which are evident in the church in Thessalonica:

2 Thessalonians 1:3 (NLT) Dear brothers and sisters, we can't help but thank God for you, because your faith is flourishing and your love for one another is growing.

We need these characteristics to be evident in our church too!

HOW IS THIS LOVE EVIDENCED IN OUR LIVES?

This is the easy part which we all know so well:

1 Corinthians 12:4-7 (NLT) Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud ⁵ or rude. It does not demand its own way. It is not irritable, and it keeps no record of being wronged. ⁶ It does not rejoice about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out. ⁷ Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance.

None of us are perfect, we all struggle from time to time, but our lives should be evidencing a growing manifestation of these characteristics.

My first questions this morning are these:

- ***Are these characteristics of love daily being evidenced in our lives?***
- ***Are they growing?***
- ***Or do we have some work to do?***

WHAT INFLUENCES MY ABILITY TO GROW IN LOVE?

1 Corinthians 12:4-24 (NLT) There are different kinds of spiritual gifts, but the same Spirit is the source of them all. ⁵ There are different kinds of service, but we serve the same Lord. ⁶ God works in different ways, but it is the same God who does the work in all of us. ⁷ A spiritual gift is given to each of us so we can help each other. ⁸ To one person the Spirit gives the ability to give wise advice; to another the same Spirit gives a message of special knowledge. ⁹ The same Spirit gives great faith to another, and to someone else the one Spirit gives the gift of healing. ¹⁰ He gives one person the power to perform miracles, and another the ability to prophesy. He gives someone else the ability to discern whether a message is from the Spirit of God or from another spirit. Still another person is given the ability to speak in unknown languages, while another is given the ability to interpret what is being said. ¹¹ It is the one and only Spirit who distributes all these gifts. He alone decides which gift each person should have.

One Body with Many Parts

¹² The human body has many parts, but the many parts make up one whole body. So it is with the body of Christ. ¹³ Some of us are Jews, some are Gentiles, some are slaves, and some are free. But we have all been baptized into one body by one Spirit, and we all share the same Spirit.

¹⁴ Yes, the body has many different parts, not just one part. ¹⁵ If the foot says, "I am not a part of the body because I am not a hand," that does not make it any less a part of the body. ¹⁶ And if the ear says, "I am not part of the body because I am not an eye," would that make it any less a part of the body? ¹⁷ If the whole body were an eye, how would you hear? Or if your whole body were an ear, how would you smell anything?

¹⁸ But our bodies have many parts, and God has put each part just where he wants it. ¹⁹ How strange a body would be if it had only one part! ²⁰ Yes, there are many parts, but only one body. ²¹ The eye can never say to the hand, "I don't need you." The head can't say to the feet, "I don't need you."

²² In fact, some parts of the body that seem weakest and least important are actually the most necessary. ²³ And the parts we regard as less honorable are those we clothe with the greatest care. So we carefully protect those parts that should not be seen, ²⁴ while the more honorable parts do not require this special care. So God has put the body together such that extra honour and care are given to those parts that have less dignity.

This passage gives us many keys to growing in love. It clearly illuminates pitfalls and positives which we can draw on to help us grow in love.

1. Spiritual unity (vs.4-6)!

- We all have the same spirit – the Holy Spirit.
- We may have different gifts, callings and ministry, but they all come from the same Holy Spirit.
- We may serve in different areas in the church, but all of us are serving the same Lord – Jesus Christ!
- We are all part of one body which has different parts.
- Each part is dependent on the other.

2.The reason we have spiritual gifts is to help one another (vs.7).

- Not so that anyone can be better than another – God is no respecter of persons.
- Helping one-another is an expression of love!

3.Our gifts are "grace gifts" (vs.11).

- The gifts we have are just that...gifts!
- They don't come because we are better than others, but because the Holy Spirit chooses to give them to us.

- Pride impedes our ability to love. When we realise that we don't have these gifts because we are better than others, it will take us off any pride-pedestal we may be on, and help us to walk in love.

4. God has put each one of us just where He wants us (vs.18)

- Each of us is a perfect fit.
- Not one of us can say that another is not needed, or that we are not needed.
- We rely on each other – this will help us to appreciate each and every member of the congregation.
- Appreciating one-another can become an expression of love!

5. The weak get special attention (vs.22)!

Paul says that some parts of the body that seem weakest and least important are actually the most necessary. He uses the parts that we cover because we don't want others to see them as the example - we take more care covering them than what we do to cover the parts we seem to use more.

- As we care for and protect our weaker members, we demonstrate love in action.

6. We are all important, regardless of race, and social standing (vs.13)!

Some were Jews, some were Gentiles, some were slaves, and some were free. But they had all had been baptized into one body by one Spirit, and all shared the same Holy Spirit.

- This means that no-one was more important than another.
- Rich or poor, Black, White, Coloured, Asian or anything else made no difference. They all had the same Holy Spirit.
- As we display behaviour that demonstrates acceptance of one-another, we demonstrate love in action.

1 Corinthians 12:25-27 (NLT) This makes for harmony among the members, so that all the members care for each other. ²⁶ If one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it, and if one part is honored, all the parts are glad. ²⁷ All of you together are Christ's body, and each of you is a part of it.

- Harmony among the members – this will lead to wonderful mutual respect.
- All the members care for one another- not just some elite groups.
- If one suffers, all suffer – this will result in acts of kindness motivated by love.
- If one of us is honoured, we will all be happy.

PRACTICAL APPLICATION IN THE CONGREGATION:

- Because we are all inter-reliant on each other, when one is missing, we all feel it – we call them, not to moan at them for not being around and carrying their weight, but because we care for them and are **genuinely** interested in their well-being.
- If someone has been away for a while and we see them in church during greeting time, instead of giving them a sarcastic comment, we say, “I’m so glad to see you, I missed you, are you doing okay?”
- If we know someone has got a need, we offer to help, even if it means sacrifice. This includes letting the pastor know so that the church itself can also assist.
- We treat people who are different, the poor, the sick, those of different race groups with great respect, not shunning them, but learning to show them the indwelling love of Christ.

When we put this into practice, we will not only be showing love, but we will be growing in love.

Let us ask ourselves today:

- ***Have we been showing genuine love?***
- ***Have we been helping those in need, or have we been saying, “that’s the church’s problem?”***
- ***Are we treating those who are weaker, poorer, richer, different from ourselves with love and respect in:***
 - ***What we say?***
 - ***What we don’t say?***
 - ***What we do?***
 - ***How we greet?***
 - ***When we fellowship together?***

If not, then we fall short of growing in love and we need to adjust our behaviour to show the love of Christ.

CONCLUSION

John 13:35 (NLT) Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples.”

We want to be known as a church of Irresistible Influence. No matter how hard we work at it, we will never achieve it without love.

If we want to be known better and better, then we need to learn to love more and more – we need to be growing in love! Let us make this a focus. Let us do some serious soul-searching and make this church the loving church we want it to be.