

“Above all, love each other deeply”

1 Peter 4:7-11

June 18, 2017

This morning’s service is a really exciting combination of child dedications, welcoming new members, and partaking in communion together. Each of these illustrates what a special connection we have here as a local church. We are not just a meeting place for teaching truth from the Bible, nor are we solely focused on worshipping our amazing God. Those would both be reason enough to gather. But, that is not all that church is intended to be. Church is intended to be a community of those who’ve been rescued by God’s grace for the purpose of loving one another. For sharing life together. So, we help each other grow spiritually. We help raise each other’s children. We welcome new members into a family; where we are brothers and sisters in Christ. We unite around this communion meal because we are one body of Christ united by one Holy Spirit.

The passage we read earlier begins with 1 Peter 4:7, “The end of all things is near. Therefore be alert and of sober mind so that you may pray.” We just wrapped up our 10-point SOF with a careful discussion of the End Times. The Return of Christ and our Eternal Destiny are important theological truths for us to understand and to consider. They motivate us to action but they also influence our attitudes toward what matters most. They make us alert and of sober mind so that we pray. But, the end of all things also helps us to evaluate our highest priorities.

1 Peter 4:8 says, “Above all, love each other deeply”¹ In light of the end of all things, here is something we should give top priority to: “love each other deeply.” Now, it’s interesting that Peter chooses this. I might have expected Peter to say, “Above all, preach the gospel!” For example, in 1 Peter 3:15, he instructs them to, “. . . Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have”

I might have expected Peter to say, “Above all, live pure and holy lives!” After all, in 1 Peter 4:3-4, just a few verses before v. 8, he says, “For you have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do—living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry. They are surprised that you do not join them in their reckless, wild living, and they heap abuse on you.”

Now, sharing the gospel and living in purity are certainly important, and Peter has already addressed each of them. But, when he comes to 1 Peter 4:8 he says, “Above all, love each other deeply” So, we do well to pay attention to it. Let’s meditate on this for just a few minutes this morning. Why such an emphasis on how we love our fellow Christians? Is it really so important that we should place it “above all?” Peter isn’t saying it’s our only priority, but he is certainly saying it deserves an important rank in our list of what matters most.

So, the obvious question for each Christ-follower is this: Have I made this one of MY top priorities? Where does loving other Christ-followers fit in my personal list of life priorities? And, not just loving them, but loving them deeply? You see, the New Testament doesn’t go easy on us here. When it talks about believers loving one another, it aims incredibly high, or perhaps I should say incredibly deep. Shallow, lip-service kind of love is not enough. The word translated “deeply”² pertains to loving with perseverance, with the implication that it should not waver in its display of interest, devotion, eagerness, or earnestness.³ The NASB translates it “keep fervent in your love for one another.” The ESV says, “keep loving one another earnestly.” This stresses the idea that this is an ongoing love relationship. Mutual Christian love is intended to grow deeper and deeper over time. As each of us matures in our personal faith, our Grace Community grows in its love for one other.

¹ 1 Peter 1:22 says, “Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for each other, love one another deeply, from the heart.”

² “ἔκτενῆς”

³ Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., & Bauer, W. (2000). *A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature* (3rd ed., p. 310). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Many places throughout Scripture command us to love each other. That exact phrase “love one another” shows up at least 13 times in the NT including the Gospel of John, Romans, Hebrews, 1 Peter, and 1 & 2 John. But there are many other times where the very same idea is expressed in various ways in Scripture. Jesus commands us to love each other in John 13:34-35, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

The is right in line with our Great Commandment call to love God and love people. Jesus commands us to focus in on our love for our fellow Christians. Our love for one another, turns out to be an essential piece of evidence for how a watching world can see that we are indeed Christ’s followers.

The inverse of this is also true. When the world sees a lack of love in the church, it kills our witness. We end up driving people away from the church rather than drawing them near to Christ. Now, this doesn’t mean we’ll never have conflict or tension or disagreement. We absolutely will; just like they did in the early church. This is why 1 Peter 4:8 is so honest, “Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.” We need to love each other deeply because of the very fact that we are all still fallen human beings. The church is full of humans. Human pastors and human laity. Human men and women who are all sinners. We need to model Christian love and grace in the midst of our sins so that a watching world sees a true demonstration of God’s reconciling work in our broken world.

This is why Colossians 3:12-14 reminds us, “Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.”

As important as our study of theology has been over these past 10 Sundays on our SOF, LOVE matters more. Here is why I say that so frankly: 1 Corinthians 12:31-13:3 says, “...I will show you the most excellent way. If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have 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 do not have love, I am nothing. 3 If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.”

When we lack love, all of the best spiritual giftings fall short. Our theological belief system and any amount of sacrificial Christian living fall apart. 1 Cor. 13 is sandwiched in the context of chapters 12 and 14, which are all about the body of Christ. This isn’t just a beautiful text for reading at weddings. This is a beautiful text to describe the bride of Christ, His Church.

Today, we remember the body of Christ in the bread and the juice of the communion elements. We are celebrating our Lord’s love for us. And, one of the best ways for us to honor our Lord’s love, is to practice it in our love for one another. **Therefore, above all, let us love each other deeply.**

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