

What's Love Got to Do with It?

This past Tuesday was Valentine's Day—I hope that you did not forget it. I didn't really forget it, I was just a little late getting out to get a card until during the day on Tuesday—my bout with the flu prevented me from doing it any earlier. Now I was successful in finding a Valentine's Day card at Food Lion, but the candies were all gone. So, I decided to start a new tradition and instead of chocolate candy, I bought Flo a block of Crispy Kreme Donuts. (It actually didn't go over too badly.) But, I must admit that I have sometimes almost let Valentine's Day slip by without remembering to get a Valentine's Day card or a box of candy or donuts. It isn't because I don't appreciate my wife or that I don't like Valentine's Day—hey I love'em both!—but I am just not that good at remembering most holidays, except for Christmas and Easter. Now there is no excuse for that—I should remember Valentine's Day, because it is an important day. It is a day committed to remembering what love is all about—not just as love relates to husbands and wives, boyfriends and girlfriends—but, it includes the love that God expects us to have for one another. And more especially, it includes our own love for God, and His love for us. So why do we—particularly us men—have no problem remembering Christmas and Easter, but tend to forget Valentine's Day? Well, the sad truth might be that all of us—men and women alike—just tend to have this incomplete concept of “love”; i.e. I think we may be guilty of trivializing the meaning of love. And perhaps this is exposed in the way that we verbally express love or like to hear it expressed.

For example, think about the lyrics of your favorite songs that come to mind when you think about Valentine's Day. That's what Billboard.com did recently when it selected the top 50 love songs of the last 50 years—songs like: Taylor Swift's *Love Story* in 2009; or *You've Lost that Lovin' Feelin* by the Righteous Brothers way back in 1965; The Partridge Family's rather forgettable *I Think I Love You* song; or back in 1975 there was the Captain and Tennille's *Love Will Keep Us Together*; more recently, *Crazy in Love* by Beyonce; or back in time again to Ray Charles' *I Can't Stop Loving You*; or even Tina Turner's 1984 hit, *What's love got to do with it?*

The problem is that these favorite songs usually focus on only one aspect of love—something that the ancient Greeks referred to as **eros** love. It involves the sensual, romantic love that we typically associate with Valentine's Day. But our understanding of love needs to go in a different direction when we consider what *real love* is truly all about. So at least Tina Turner was asking the right question when she sang, “*What's Love Got to Do with it?*”—particularly if the “*IT*” that we are concerned about is life itself. Now beyond these so-called “Top 50 Love Songs,” there is a Christian song that gets into this in

great detail and it was written by a fellow named Paul—not Paul Simon, or Paul McCartney—but the Apostle Paul. We don't tend to think of Paul as a songwriter, but he did author at least one song. And amazingly, it was the greatest love song of all time. If you own a Bible, then you've got the lyrics because they appear right there in 1 Corinthians 13.

In fact, New Testament scholars point out that 1 Corinthians 13 is a hymn written in three stanzas. In the first stanza (verses 1-3), we are told that “Love is indispensable to the Christian life.” The second stanza (verses 4-7) emphasizes that the very nature of love is tied up in the nature of Jesus Christ, i.e. “Love is Christ-like”—it is “outgoing, self-giving” and marked by an “unselfish concern for others.” And finally, the third stanza that closes out this song identifies love as the greatest of all gifts from God, outlasting all of the other precious gifts that God gives to us.¹

So what is the quality of this “love” that Paul would have us sing about? Let's consider that first stanza in verses 1-3. Paul writes: ¹ Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become a sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. ² And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. ³ And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing. 1 Corinthians 13:1-3 (NKJV)

Now bear in mind that the love Paul is talking about is not the romantic love encompassed in the Greek word *eros*—no, it is not that at all. Rather, the word Paul uses is *agapē*²—I am sure that it is a word that you have heard before. It is the love that is used to describe God's unconditional love for us—it is the love Jesus has for all of His followers. The ultimate example of God's love is the gift of His Son, who taught us that we are to reflect that same kind of love in our relationship with others. When Jesus said, “I give you a new commandment: that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you should also love one another”—the Greek word that He uses is *agapē*.³ John 13:34 HCSB.

When Paul compares *agapē* love to speaking with the tongues of men and angel, he is referring to the gift of great speech, great oratory. It was a highly prized gift in the ancient world and remains so today. But, you might have the gift of a silver tongue in your mouth, but if you lack the love of Christ in your heart, then you are really nothing more than a noise maker. As the Christian writer, Alan Carr, once said, “Oratory can move one to tears, but only love can move one to Jesus.”⁴

Another thing that was highly sought after in Paul's time was what he refers to as the gift prophecy, understanding and knowledge—i.e., knowing great things and being perceptive as to the coming of future events. A person may have all of these things, yet without God's love they are nothing. Many Christians pray and ask God to increase their faith. Maybe you have prayed such a prayer. But,

don't forget to pray for a love-filled heart as well. Now this is a hard thing to swallow, but there are people who have so much faith that they can move mountains—but, the problem is that their hearts are devoid of love. When Judgment Day comes, they will point out to Jesus their so-called “great faith”—but when Jesus gazes into their hearts, He won't find an ounce of love. Do you know what Jesus is going to say to them? The Bible tells us the answer. Jesus, noticing their lack of love, is going to turn to them and say: “I never knew you. Get away from me, you wicked people!” Matthew 7:23 (TEV) Do you know why He will say that?—because faith without love is no faith at all. In fact the Bible specifically states that, “Anyone who does not love does not know God.” 1 John 4:8 (ESV)

Moving on to the second stanza of Paul's song, he tells us the true characteristics of *agapē* love. In verses 4-7, he writes: ⁴ “Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; ⁵ does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; ⁶ does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; ⁷ bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.” 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 (NKJV) If you have true Christian love in your heart, you are able to trade gentleness and compassion when all that you get in return may be harshness and insults—that's what Paul means when he says that you will be long suffering and kind. Jealousies and pride depart from your character. When some people viciously lash out at others—maybe even with a “tweet” or two, their hearts are full of hate, but are woefully low on love. But for those in Christ, love is transformational. Things like patience, kindness and truth not only start to matter, but form the basis from which they approach all people—friend and foe alike. Hope and perseverance replace despair and weariness as *agapē* love becomes a hallmark of their existence.

And now we come to that final stanza of Paul's hit love song in verses 8-13, which describe the everlasting nature of *agapē* love. The first three words are, for me, some of the most encouraging of all. It reads: ⁸ “Love never fails. [Those words alone are so inspirational.] But whether there are prophecies, they will fail; whether there are tongues, they will cease; whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away. ⁹ For we know in part and we prophesy in part. ¹⁰ But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away. ¹¹ When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things. ¹² For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known. ¹³ And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.” 1 Corinthians 13:8-13 (NKJV)

Wow!—the greatest of these is love! Do you know why the greatest of these is love?—because God is love.⁵ That is why Paul assures us that the future of love is guaranteed—because Jesus is, in fact, coming again and His reign will be from everlasting to everlasting,⁶ and His love endures forever.⁷ We

can say that now, but even now our understanding of that sacred fact is incomplete—it is imperfect—as Paul tells us here. But one day that is going to change. One day, we are going to see Jesus face to face and when we do our understanding of His great love for us will be complete.

What an amazing song Paul has written for us here! And someone might complain that Valentine’s Day has nothing to do with this kind of love—not the love Paul is telling us about. I’m not so sure about that. The need for love in this world cannot be underestimated. There are forces afoot that would smother such love if it could. For example, it was reported not too long ago that Muslim and Hindu leaders in Asia were trying to prohibit the celebration of Valentine’s Day. They saw it as a serious threat to their cultural heritage. It became so bad at one point that it was reported that, “Cities in India have outlawed [Valentine] cards, and guards spent the day searching campuses looking for couples daring to celebrate the holiday. In [the tiny south Asian nation of] Brunei, Valentine’s Day has been declared a threat to Islam. Religious leaders fear the ‘Christian practice’ of Valentine’s Day could ‘erode moral values, weaken the community and destroy Islam.’”⁸ But their fear of Valentine’s Day, of course, is misplaced. And yet when we hear things like this we begin to have some inkling of what Jesus was trying to tell us when He said that He is “the way, the truth and the life, no man comes to the Father except through me.” John 14:6 (NIV) Those without Christ in their lives—whether Hindus, Muslims, atheists, or maybe your neighbor down the street—react so vehemently against the love Jesus offers. They want to push it aside. And when they do that—when they tend to look at us as the enemy, and when they hate us—our reaction cannot be to lash out at them, but to embrace them. Why? Because though I may have Christ on my mind, though I may have been blessed with many things from Christ, though I may have faith that could move mountains—these things are not enough. It is not enough to merely have Jesus on my mind—I need to have Jesus’ love in my heart—for without love, “I am nothing.”

So, maybe we all need to start taking Valentine’s Day more seriously because there is a strong parallel between the romantic love of Valentine’s Day and the relationship that Jesus Christ wants to have with you. When we get married, we go on honeymoons—it’s a time when a husband’s and wife’s love for each other is so intense—there’s so much excitement and intensity in the relationship. But, then we get back from the honeymoon and we settle back into the routine of married life. And, we come to realize that “the honeymoon” is over. John Piper in his book, *The Pleasures of God*, tells us something that Paul was getting at in his “love song.” This is what Piper says: “Sometimes we joke and say about marriage, ‘The honeymoon is over’. But that’s because we are finite. We can’t sustain a honeymoon level of intensity and affection. . . We can’t stay as fit and handsome as we were then. We

can't come up with enough new things to keep the relationship that fresh. But God says His joy over His people is like a bridegroom over a bride. He is talking about honeymoon intensity and honeymoon pleasures and honeymoon energy and excitement and enthusiasm and enjoyment. . [for] with God the honeymoon never ends.”⁹

That’s what God’s love for us is like—it never fades, because as Paul reminds us His “love never fails.” The question is: Will you sing that love song Paul has written?—sing it by the way that you live your life. Tina Turner asked, “What’s Love Got to Do with It?” Well, the answer is simple: It has to do with ***everything!***—every facet of your life. That’s true of Valentine’s Day and every day for the followers of Jesus Christ.

Let us pray.

Darvin Satterwhite, Pastor ©2017
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Forest Hill Baptist Church

¹ *The Teacher’s Bible Commentary: A concise, thorough interpretation of the entire Bible designed especially for Sunday School teachers*, ed. H. Franklin Paschall and Herschel H. Hobbs, (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1972), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 730.

² James Strong, *Strong’s Talking Greek & Hebrew Dictionary*, (Austin, TX: WORDsearch Corp., 2007), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, Under: “26”.

³ David Lanier, *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, ed. Chad Brand, Charles Draper, Archie England (Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003), s.v. “LOVE,” WORDsearch CROSS e-book.

⁴ Alan Carr, *The Sermon Notebook – 1 Corinthians*, (Lenoir, NC: Alan Carr, 2012), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, Under: “God’s Greatest Gift to His Church – 1 Corinthians 13:1-13”.

⁵ 1 John 4:8 (ESV) . . . God is love.

⁶ Psalm 90:2 (NASB) Before the mountains were born Or You gave birth to the earth and the world, Even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God.

⁷ Psalm 100:5 (ESV) For the LORD is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations.

⁸ Jim L. Wilson, *Fresh Illustrations*, (Austin, TX: WORDsearch, 2004), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, Under: “LOVE/VALENTINE’S DAY”—<http://www.worldnetdaily.com>, February 13, 2002, Submitted by Jim Sandell.

⁹ John Piper, *The Pleasures of God (Multnomah, 2000)*, p. 188, <http://www.preachingtoday.com>.