

INTRODUCTION

- One of the clearest evidences of a person who has become a Christian, who has been born again, is a desire to please God by doing His will – and so an early question that continues until death is “what is God’s will for my life?”
- While there are many particulars (college, vocation, marriage, location, etc.) in our passage we see three major categories that are universal, for every believer in answer to the question “what is God’s will for my life?”
- The first category Paul addressed was sexual purity; now we turn to the 2nd, that of brotherly love

EXPOSITION

What is This Brotherly Love?- v.9a

- The word is a compound word (Gk. philadelphia), and is more than just love, but love of brothers; used positively
- 1.) It includes the **affections** (Rom12:10 Gk. philostorgos warmly affectionate, devoted to) 1Pet1:22 3:8 (adj.) 4:8
- 2.) It is something that must be **cultivated** (2Pet1:7) – not just something that comes naturally
- 3.) It is an evidence of being **born again** (1Jn3:14)
The Spirit of God is a Spirit of love, and when the Spirit enters the soul, love also enters with it. God is love, and he that has God dwelling in him by his Spirit, will have love dwelling in him also. The nature of the Holy Spirit is love; and it is by communicating himself, in his own nature, to the saints, that their hearts are filled with divine charity (Jonathan Edwards, Charity and Its Fruits).
- 4.) It is command on par with **believing on Jesus Christ** (1Jn3:23)
- 5.) It is an evidence of **knowing God** (1Jn4:7ff)
- 6.) It is necessary for the **building up** of the body of Christ – (Eph4:16)
- 7.) It is an evidence to the world of our being true **disciples** (student-followers) of Jesus – (John 13:34-35)
- 8.) It is perfectly modeled in the love of Jesus for us - (John 13:34-35)
- What does this actually look like? There is a general love to neighbor that Scripture points us to.
- Jonathan Edwards give a **helpful summary** of the Bible’s call to love others

If men have a hearty love to their neighbors, it will dispose them to all acts of justice towards them. Men are not disposed to wrong those whom they truly love....Love will dispose to truth towards neighbors, and will tend to prevent all lying, fraud and deceit... Love will dispose to walk humbly among men. For real and dear love will dispose men to high thoughts of them; and Christian love disposes men to think others better than themselves. Love will dispose men to honor one another. For we are naturally inclined to think honorably of those whom we love, and to give them honor....Love will dispose to contentment in the [position of life] in which God hath set him, without coveting anything which his neighbor possesses, or envying him any good thing which he has. Love will dispose men to meekness and gentleness in their carriage towards their neighbors, and not to treat them with passion or violence, but with moderation and calmness. Love checks and restrains a bitter spirit....Love will prevent broils and quarrels, and will dispose to peaceableness. Love will dispose men to forgive injuries, which they receive from their neighbors.... Love will dispose men to all acts of mercy towards our neighbor who is under any affliction or calamity (Edwards, Charity pp.7-8).

- As I look through Edwards explanation, I see at least 9 traits: justice, truth, humility, honor, contentment, meekness, gentleness, peaceableness, forgiveness, and mercy.
- How much greater this love should be among **the church** because of our experience of the Gospel
- Christian love for other Christians is a love that is deeply rooted in who we are because of **our union with Christ**, and so union with one another.

I. IT WAS UNNECESSARY FOR PAUL TO WRITE THEM ABOUT THIS LOVE – v.9b

- He doesn’t have to go **back to the basics** and instruct them as if they didn’t know
- They were **familiar** with it, as it was a part of the **first principles** of the apostolic teaching of the Faith
- It was unnecessary for two reasons

A. God Himself Had Taught Them – v.9c

- **Taught by God** is unique term, used only here in NT
- People can be taught by men, but it have no effect - when someone is taught by God, they are **transformed and changed**
- This distinction may be what is difference in your life **for some of you**– are you merely being taught by men (by an increase of bare knowledge) or are you being taught by God (evidenced in transformation)?

God's teaching, does not only enlighten the mind, but reaches the affections, and especially inclines the heart to love, for God is love (Poole).

B. They Were Already Practicing It – v.10a

- Paul mentions that their love had been in some way demonstrated throughout the whole province
- Likely expressed in that Thessalonica was a major trade city and the capital of the province, and fellow Christians would travel through and there would be opportunities to show tangible love
- This reminds us of the need for a **biblically ecumenical spirit** – 1 Corinthians 1:2
- This includes love for the disciples of Christ, even when there are **doctrinal difference and problems**
- Think of **how Paul loved** the variety of churches he writes to, with very different problems and strengths
- **Jesus' love** for the churches in **Revelation 2 & 3**, and the variety of those today, is not less but greater
- This doesn't mean that we agree with everything churches do, or how they do it (there are fundamentals), but it should mean that there is a recognition of **God's working outside** of our doctrinal distinctives
- As opportunity comes, there is a **loving correction** by the Word of God, but it is done with certain graciousness – without this we will descend into self-righteousness and lack of humility

II. THOUGH THEY WERE CLEARLY DISPLAYING IT, HE URGES THEM TO INCREASE IN IT – v.10b

- Even with this real and tangible love, Paul urges them to increase more and more
- Notice what Paul does – he first encourages them of the manifestation of love, then he urges them to increase in it
- This might be received very differently than merely calling them to love
- I think we have a good example of how we should frequently encourage one another's spiritual growth – take notice of what is good in others, and encourage it by telling them you see it in them
We should take notice of that in others which is good, to their praise, that by so doing we may lay engagements upon them to abound therein more and more. (Henry)
- Even as Paul addresses the church and their general love, this doesn't mean that there aren't individuals who could improve

APPLICATION

*If love is so great a thing in Christianity, so essential and distinguishing, yea, the very sum of all Christian virtue, then surely those that profess themselves Christians should **live in love**, and **abound in the works of love**; for no works are so becoming as those of love.*

*.... **If your heart is full of love, it will find vent**; you will find or make ways enough to express your love in deeds. When a fountain abounds in water, it will send forth streams. Consider that as a principle of love is the main principle in the heart of a real Christian, so the labor of love is the **main business** of the Christian life. (Jonathan Edwards, *Charity and Its Fruits*).*

- As your pastor, I believe that I too can say that **as a church** you too are taught of God.
- Where churches fight, split, have power struggles, hold bitterness, are thin-skinned and always ready to be offended, this love is sadly lacking.
- There is **genuine, Christ-centered, brethren serving** love here – and for that I acknowledge and honor Christ's work in you - now...**abound more and more!!!**
- **What do we need** to do so? Simply sit down with a list of "to do's" to plan to fulfill them?
- This could probably be our **greatest mistake**. If we are to abound in love, we must first come to the realization that this is something that we are completely incapable of doing in our own strength (Jn15:5 6:33).
- We must confess that inability, and then feed into the river of our soul the streams of God's mercy to us. It is then we can flow out into others.
- We need to **increasingly understand the love of Christ** for us, and by that be fired to love others. - Eph3:16-19
- Without this it will be but an **empty shell** of duties
- This is one of the **clearest evidences** of conversion to Christ (young or old): an increasing Christ-like love for the body of Christ and the individual Christians in it
- Do **you** have this love? Do you have your great passion the person of Jesus, and your great desire above all things to be like Him?