

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, 8-11-13 AM
"LOVE AND THE CROSS"
EPHESIANS 5:2

#10 in Series, "Faith, Hope, Love: Three Distinctives of the Christian Life"

1 Corinthians 13:13 (NKJV) "And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these *is* love."

Romans 5:8 (NKJV) "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

When we have experienced God's love through coming to the cross in total trust and reliance on what Christ accomplished there, we are enabled to pour out that same love on others.

2 Corinthians 2:15 (NKJV) "For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing."

Philippians 2:15 (NKJV) "that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world."

We will ultimately treat others in the church the same way we perceive that God treats us.

Romans 5:5b (ESV) "... God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us."

I. Experiencing the Cross Enables Us to Love Others by Accepting Them

Romans 15:7 (NASB) "Therefore, accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God."

Ephesians 1:6 (NKJV) "to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He has made us accepted in the Beloved."

Every true Christian has accepted Christ and His payment on the cross for sin, but most Christians have never accepted their acceptance by the Father because they are in Christ.

There are two consequences to a works based acceptance:

- We will always serve God with the wrong motive
- We will put others on the same basis of acceptance that we perceive God has us on.

II. Experiencing the Cross Enables Us to Love Others by Forgiving Them

Ephesians 4:32 (NKJV) "And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you."

Our vertical relationship determines our horizontal relationships.

Colossians 3:13 (NKJV) "bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also *must do*."

Colossians 2:13-14 (NKJV) “¹³ And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, ¹⁴ having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.”

Human pride calls for self-payment.

Wallowing in guilt even after coming to Christ causes us to have a totally self focus and not only makes it impossible for us to love Jesus; it makes it impossible for us to love others.

*Jesus paid it all;
All to him I owe.
Sin had left a crimson stain;
He washed it white as snow.*
- Elvina Hall (1865)

Anyone who uses the Biblical doctrine of forgiveness as a license to sin is not saved.

1 John 2:4 (NKJV) “He who says, ‘I know Him,’ and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.”

“The sins of the ungodly plunge the spear into Jesus’ side. The sins of the Christian plunge it into His heart.”
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1 Corinthians 13:13 (NKJV) “And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these *is* love.”

Thus far our focus on the distinctive of love has been has been 1 Corinthians 13. The bulk of 1 Corinthians 13 was on the preeminence, the perfections or qualities of love, and the permanence of love. The emphasis in this last message in this series is on how the cross enables us to love one another as Christ has also loved us. The greatest display of the Father’s love for us was the cross. **Romans 5:8 (NKJV)** says “But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” Because of the cross where Christ took our sins and there drank the cup of God’s wrath for those sins, God is now free to pour out His love on us by accepting us fully and forgiving us entirely.

The cross connects us with the amazing grace and love of God. Here is the main point of this message. ***When we have experienced God’s love through coming to the cross in total trust and reliance on what Christ accomplished there, we are enabled to pour out that same love on others.*** Just as that love that sent His Son to the cross enabled the Father to accept us and forgive us, we who have come to the cross are now free to love others by accepting them and forgiving them. Ephesians 5:2 says that Christ’s love poured out on the cross is “...an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma.” When we have come to the cross, we who live in a stinking rotting world are to be like perfume bottles filled with the fragrance of Christ. **2 Corinthians 2:15 (NKJV)** “For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among

those who are being saved and among those who are perishing.” In a world full of darkness we are to shine like the stars. **Philippians 2:15 (NKJV)** “that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world”. This world is longing (whether they know it or not) for acceptance and forgiveness. They will never be able to earn it no matter how hard they try. It is only available by the love motivated grace of God poured out at the cross. One of the tasks of the church is to manifest that acceptance and forgiveness in our relationships with one another so the unbelieving world will see these biblical truths with skin on!

Let me give you a principle. We will ultimately treat others in the church the same way we perceive that God treats us. To be more specific, we will tend to accept and forgive others the same way we perceive (rightly or wrongly) that God accepts and forgives us. I think most every Christian at some time in his life has asked the question, “Why isn’t there more love in the church?” The answer is clear to me. Most in the church have never really comprehended and thus experienced God’s love manifested at the cross. For most of those in the typical church, God’s love is a concept they believe intellectually but we have never really embraced that accepting and forgiving love experientially. Have you ever noticed that being religious doesn’t make a person loving? Some of the meanest people I have ever known were faithful in their attendance to church and active in the ministries of the church. These people never manifest true Biblical love because they at best have a warped view of God’s love and at worst have never been to the cross where we experience that saving, accepting, and forgiving love. We will never really love one another until we experience God’s love.

Let me remind you of some things about this amazing love of God that we looked at several weeks ago. This love that we love one another with is not something that we work up. It is God’s love flowing through us that enables us to truly love others by accepting and forgiving them. **Romans 5:5b (ESV)** “... God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.” Our cry ought to continually be, “Oh Father, I cannot love [you fill in the name] by accepting them and forgiving them after what they have done, but You can love them through me by accepting and forgiving them, and I am trusting you to do it.”

Let’s examine this dual manifestation of God’s love through us in two areas.

I. Experiencing the Cross Enables Us to Love Others by Accepting Them

Romans 15:7 (NASB) “Therefore, accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God.” In every heart there is a longing for acceptance. God wired us that way so that we would look to Him alone for our acceptance. That deep need God wired us with explains why we all find rejection so devastating. Here is some of the most glorious news I could ever share with you. When you come to the cross trusting in Christ alone your sins are forgiven, Christ’s righteousness is imputed to you and you stand clean, forgiven, and righteous before a holy God. Now, because you are in Christ, God’s beloved Son, God (the God who created all that is and created you for Himself) fully and completely ACCEPTS YOU! **Ephesians 1:6 (NKJV)** “to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which **He has made us accepted in the Beloved.**” The truth that I am accepted in Christ makes me also want to praise the glory of His grace! So many Christians have never even comprehended, much less rejoiced in the glorious truth of God’s acceptance. They still see God as operating on a performance based acceptance. God says (in their view) “If you perform well (don’t sin, read your Bible, pray every day, tithe, work hard in the church) then I will accept you. If however you don’t perform well, I will reject you and be mad at you and you will have to wait a long time living on probation before I will accept you again.” Certainly God is grieved when we disobey and as our perfect Father He disciplines us when we stray from him but he will never reject one of His children. He never puts us on probation. He accepts us fully and completely at all times because He never accepted us based on our performance in the first place; it has always been a Jesus based acceptance instead of a performance based acceptance. When we sin our intimacy with Him is disrupted not our acceptance. When we genuinely repent, and confess our sin, He immediately from His side restores the intimacy. Every true Christian has accepted Christ and His payment on the cross for sin, but most Christians have never accepted their acceptance by the Father because they are in Christ. There

are two main consequences of that. One is that you will always serve God with the wrong motive. If I believe that my acceptance by God is based on my performance, then I will serve Him, not for His glory out of a heart overflowing with gratitude, but in order to milk acceptance from Him. My whole motive is selfish. I will serve Him for what I can get. The second consequence is that I will put others on the same basis of acceptance that I perceive God has me on! There is so much rejection within the church. We expect it in the world, but not in the church! Why is it so prevalent? It is because people who are on a performance based acceptance with God put others on a performance based acceptance within the Body of Christ.

Notice that I have been calling the church the “Body of Christ”. The Lord chose that as a description of the church because like the human body, the church is so diverse. How different the eye is from the ear and the foot from the gall bladder. Yet every part is necessary for the body to function as it was intended. Even so in the church, we are diverse. There are different spiritual gifts, different personality types, different educational levels, different levels of spiritual maturity, different economic situations, different cultural backgrounds, different preferences of music styles, different views of those questionable areas Romans 14 deals with, and on and on. All too often we find the tendency to accept only those who are mostly like us. Add to all that diversity the fact that the church is made up of flawed people with a power in them called sin and sometimes people act after the flesh and sin and disappoint us. There are times when people lose their temper, fall into immorality, say harsh things, embellish the truth, leave us out of conversations or fail to invite us to gatherings. We hurt one another. Certainly love confronts when there is sin, but we don’t reject one another when our performance is not up to par. The way the lord has accepted us is the pattern for how we are to accept others. Is there anyone in the body of Christ that you have rejected or more accurately have failed to be proactive about accepting? When we ignore, we have communicated rejection. In a larger church, we really have to focus on this. Let me ask you an even more important question. Have you ever really accepted your acceptance by God because you are in Christ? If not you will have your spouse, your children, your friends, your coworkers and those in the church on a performance based acceptance. “If you are my kind and if you perform well and don’t mess up big time then I will accept you; otherwise you are rejected.” Oh how that attitude must be repented of.

II. Experiencing the Cross Enables Us to Love Others by Forgiving Them

Ephesians 4:32 (NKJV) “And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you.” Notice the principle: we accept others as the Father has accepted us, and now we see that we forgive others as the Father has forgiven us. Our vertical relationship determines our horizontal relationships. If the vertical is not correct, the horizontal will be messed up. I am convinced that the reason the church is not dispensing the fragrance of Christ in the world and shining as stars is because most in the church are flawed when it comes to their experience with the acceptance and forgiveness of God.

Let’s talk about forgiveness for a moment. If I don’t comprehend how completely forgiven I am in Christ, I will never be able to completely forgive those who wrong me. Here is another verse that says basically the same thing as Ephesians 4:32; it is **Colossians 3:13 (NKJV)** “bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also *must do.*” How were you forgiven? The Father saw the cross and all that happened there and said, “It is sufficient”. He then says that we are forgiven completely because of the cross that has been applied to our life. He considers our sins paid in full by the blood (poured out life) of Jesus Christ. While there are earthly consequences of our sins, God considers them paid in full. We read in **Colossians 2:13-14 (NKJV)** “¹³ And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, ¹⁴ having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.” A feeling of guilt destroys relationships. One man said, “Guilt eats at your innards”. We need to understand something about human pride. Human pride calls for self-payment. In a strange sort of way human pride opts for our own punishment for our sins. In the Philippines, there is a

cult called the “flagelantes” who subject themselves to some of the same physical torture Jesus experienced on the cross. Some have even had themselves nailed to a cross. That same mindset is common in places other than the Philippines. For example, people who have sinned and confessed their sin after mourning over their sin, but they continue to wallow in guilt and misery and depression and continue to beat themselves up over their sin even inflicting self-punishment and refusing joy or happiness. Their humble seeming reason is “I know God has forgiven me but I cannot forgive myself”. That is simple pride and the desire to pay for our own sin. It devalues the cross, Jesus’ blood, the Father’s love for us, and makes it impossible for us to walk in a love relationship with Jesus. Some cry out, “But I’m not worthy to be forgiven”. Of course not, and the desire to be worthy is pride. Besides, it is “Worthy is the Lamb”, not “Worthy are the sheep”. It’s all motivated by God’s love and carried out by His grace and mercy. Love, grace and mercy are pride killers! This wallowing in guilt even after coming to Christ also causes us to have a totally self focus and not only makes it impossible for us to love Jesus; it makes it impossible for us to love others. Every time this person who has not accepted their forgiveness does an act of service or kindness, their real motive is selfishness because they’re doing it to try to be worthy. It results in a totally self-centered life.

Let’s look at Colossians 2:13-14 a little closer. The tenses of the words are very important. The first part of the verse points back to before Christ. We were in a continuing state of spiritual death – separated from God and without hope in this world. However, at a point in time there was an awakening work of God that made us aware of our sin, the efficacy of the cross and granted us repentance and we reached out with childlike faith in Jesus Christ alone. Now we who were spiritually dead are alive! Look where we stand in regard to guilt, “having forgiven you all trespasses”. The tense refers to something that happened at a point in time. The moment we were joined to Christ we were forgiven ALL trespasses. That word “trespasses” is a word for sin that emphasizes missing the mark – falling short of God’s standards and demands. Follow carefully. At the moment of salvation, how many of our sins were forgiven? ALL! Would “all” cover sins before you were saved? Would “all” cover present sins – those you commit today? Would “all” include sins you commit in the future? Yes! All means all. Besides, when Jesus died on the cross, all of our sins were future.

Look again at Colossians 2:14. What are the “handwriting of requirements”? Whenever a person would be convicted in a Roman court, a “handwriting of requirements” would be prepared for him by the scribe of the court. Every crime for which he was convicted was written down with the prescribed penalty beside it. This document would then be taken with the prisoner to wherever he was imprisoned and nailed to the cell door. What a picture of our condition. Every one of us was born with “a handwriting of requirements”. For Adam’s sin, the penalty – death. For every act of sin since we knew the difference between right and wrong (every evil thought, every incident of breaking God’s law, and every omission in doing what we were supposed to do) until the time of our death is written there. The prescribed penalty for each is death. Let’s go back to the Roman custom Paul was referring to in Colossians 2:13,14. This “handwriting of requirements” would stay on the cell door until the punishment was completed. According to some sources, the officials would then take that document and write across it a word translated, “paid in full”. They would roll it up and give it to the prisoner. That prisoner could never be punished for those crimes again. Verse 14 says that Jesus took our handwriting of requirements and did something with it. He nailed it to the cross! As He hung on that old rugged cross, He cried out “It is finished!” That’s one word in the Greek language and it can actually better be translated, “paid in full!” Do you see the picture? We will never be brought before the throne of judgment for those sins because they have been paid in full. As the old hymn says:

Jesus paid it all;

All to him I owe.

Sin had left a crimson stain;

He washed it white as snow.

- Elvina Hall (1865)

When people hear the truth about forgiveness, one of the first questions usually asked is, “What about sins after we are saved?” All of us probably know someone who has abused and misapplied this doctrine of grace and lived a life of sin and excused it by saying they were saved long ago and “once saved, always saved.” To say that our sins – even future sins – are forgiven, isn’t that like giving someone a license to sin? Isn’t it akin to a “get out of jail free” card in Monopoly? Certainly there are people who have abused, misinterpreted, and been deceived about the Biblical teaching on complete forgiveness. Read my lips. Anyone who uses the Biblical doctrine of forgiveness as a license to sin **is not saved. 1 John 2:4 (NKJV)** “He who says, ‘I know Him,’ and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.” Sin makes a new creation in Christ miserable. Charles Spurgeon said, “The sins of the ungodly plunge the spear into Jesus’ side. The sins of the Christian plunge it into His heart.” The true Christian, driven by his love for Christ, his grief over what his sin has done to Christ, and the loss of the intimate walk with him that he cherished is driven to deal with his sin by confession accompanied by repentance (1 John 1:9).

When we begin to comprehend this amazing forgiveness provided by God’s love, when we are wronged, how can we refuse forgiveness? We are compelled to release the offender to God for Him to deal with. He is capable. I am to forgive. Ah, but when a person has never really accepted fully and completely God’s forgiveness in Christ, that person will find it impossible to forgive others. In fact when a Church member has bitterness and unforgiveness for another person a good place to start counseling them would be in helping them to understand and accept God’s forgiveness. Once we see how much we have been forgiven of, any offence done against us will pale in comparison.

It is impossible to separate a life of love from accepting and forgiving others. Oh what a difference this God originated love will make in your personal life, in your family and in the church.