

SELFLESS LOVE MARCHES VICTORIOUS OVER SELF-GLORIFICATION

They had issues – major issues. It's not that they weren't Christians or believers in Jesus. It's not that they hadn't been taught the faith by some of really special pastors and teachers. It's not that they didn't have skills and abilities; gifts and talents. In fact they were seemingly pretty stacked in this area. For as new as this Christian family was, God had showered them with all kinds of spiritual blessings: there were apostles and prophets; people who were teachers and others who were workers of miracles; some were healers while others were helpers and administrators. There were even those who could speak in different kinds of tongues! You might think that a new mission church, loaded with this kind of talent, would make the highlight reel of every month's WELS Connection – or whatever the equivalent of it was back in the First Century AD. Yet, they had issues, major issues.

The Apostle Paul was very familiar with this group of believers. Corinth was one of his last stops during his second missionary journey; a place he stayed for 18 months. At the time he writes this letter, about 3 years have passed and Paul is in Ephesus on his third missionary journey. Word reached his ears about some of the issues facing this growing congregation.

Just living in Corinth alone was a challenge. The city, about ½ million in size, was the home to 12 major temples, including the most infamous: Aphrodite – the goddess of love. History tells us that at one time over 1000 sacred prostitutes served in the temple. True, the congregation had its issues pertaining to the sexual kind of love; but the major issues Paul speaks about in Chapter 13 deal with a different kind of love. Agape Love – a selfless love that always triumphs over self-glorification. This is so – because of the Victory of our Savior Jesus.

Self-love and self-glorification were really the heart and core issues causing the problems. All those gifts, talents, abilities, blessings from the Lord were starting to turn inward. For as great as those gifts were, they were all equating to nothing, of no value! Instead of using their God-given gifts for God's glory and for the spiritual building up of their fellow brothers and sisters in the Lord, it was all about "Me! Look at Me! Honor me!" Love, agape love, selfless love was missing from the picture, which causes Paul to write in verse 1-3.

*If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, **but have not love**, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. ² 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 have not love**, I am nothing. ³ If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, **but have not love**, I gain nothing.* All the gifts in the world – equate to nothing, they serve no benefit whatsoever – if there is not love – AGAPE love. Why is this the case? Because when it's about ME – it's not about Christ. When it's about look at what I can do – it's never about what Christ has done. Self-glorification was killing this young family of believers. The call to repentance was in order.

On the night in which Jesus was betrayed, we see his disciples struggling with these same issues. They had been arguing about who was the greatest, (Luke 22:24). Me... me... me... and then their Lord and Savior takes off his outer garment and washes their sweaty, smelly feet, carefully washing the dirt out from between all 120 toes, yes, even those of Judas. The extent of their Savior's selfless agape love they were just beginning to see and experience that night. And then he gives them this new command, "Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." (John 13:34-35)

“As I have loved you...” These really are the key words to understanding what AGAPE Love is. As I have loved you... who me? Rebellious me? Sinful me? Me, who is so quick to love myself, and serve my own interests first? Me, who selfishly uses time, abilities, skills, resources for my own best interests, instead of planning for the glory of God and the good of my neighbor? Me? Yes – ***“As I have loved you...”*** Yes, Jesus has freely, willing, eagerly loved me and you and all. And what did Jesus’ self-less AGAPE love look like: Paul shows us in verses 4-8

⁴ *Love is patient, love is kind* – thank goodness Jesus is so patient with me – not treating me as my sins deserve – but with kind, loving, patient calls to repentance and faith in his blood!

It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud – The boast of our Savior is this – that he has conquered sin, death, and Satan so that all who trust in him may live eternally.

⁵ *It is not rude, it is not self-seeking* – Thank you Jesus, that your #1 concern was my eternal welfare! How humbled I am that you fulfilled your Father’s will, even tho it cost you so dearly.

it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs – How incredible is Jesus’ forgiveness! Even though my mind remembers in shame what I have done, you Jesus, have chosen to wipe my sins clean off, no record of them remains!

⁶ *Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth* – Jesus thank you for leading me to know and believe this truth; thank you for helping me to turn from evil, wicked lies of Satan.

⁷ *It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres* – Thank you Jesus for doing all of this 100% of the time! You persevered to accomplish what no one else could have done.

⁸ *Love never fails* – this is Jesus’ perfect AGAPE love for all – and it never, ever fails!

When our eyes and hearts, our mind and thoughts are held captive to Jesus’ perfect love – when we realize that in Jesus we have perfect peace, perfect forgiveness, perfect love and acceptance already – what have we to be selfish about... what higher glory can we seek out or hope to attain? We already have all that we need, and in heaven we will live in the full glory and love of Jesus forever. This is what Jesus’ victory over sin, the grave, and Satan assure us! And because this is true – we are free to love one another as Jesus has loved us. This is how Jesus’ selfless, AGAPE Love triumphs over selfishness and self-glory. For it is this gift, this kind of Love that endures forever – because God himself is Love.

It wasn’t too long before some of those special divine gifts and abilities ended in Corinth. What remained with them – is also what remains with us: Faith, Hope, and Love. For as we seek these gifts and blessings, as we ask God to build up this congregation and His Church across the globe in Faith, Hope, and Love – our eyes can’t help but be pointed heavenward; they can’t help but be seeking God’s gracious will.

True we still struggle in this area; we still have issues too. As Paul said, from time to time we act like children, we know in part, see but a poor reflection... but that day is coming when we will love as we have been loved. Until that day, may our gracious God keep our eyes focused on our Savior’s perfect selfless Love. And may he, by the power of his Spirit, work in our new man of faith, that ever growing ability to love one another as we have been loved. For then is our God glorified and our Savior’s triumphant victory made to shine it its full glory that the world may see and believe in him. Amen.