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Faith Bible Church
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<http://www.fbcweb.org/doctrines.html>

Personal Study of the Bible-62

1 Thessalonians 3- Application:

May the Lord cause you to increase in love, for one another, and for all people

In our final chapter-by-chapter look at 1-2 Thessalonians, we are focusing on spiritual life truths. We are now in 1 Thessalonians 3. The verses for today's lesson are 11-13:

11 Now may our God and Father Himself and Jesus our Lord direct our way to you; 12 and may the Lord cause you to increase and abound in love for one another, and for all men, just as we also do for you; 13 so that He may establish your hearts unblamable in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all His saints.

Love! It is the most important spiritual virtue and the single most difficult virtue to grasp, let alone to accurately define and describe. Note the two directions of love in the passage above: for fellow believers (read John 13:34-35) and for all men. One reason that *love* is so difficult is that it is so easy to equate love with emotions (emotions are like waves of the ocean that rise and fall) or to believe that they do not contain any feelings (affections, emotions; e.g., a non-feeling stoic view of love, contra 1 John 3:17). Both extremes are untenable on biblical grounds. This is unfortunate since love for God and for others are the greatest commandments (Matt. 22:37-39) and the most difficult—which is why divine love is so easily misunderstood and distorted. To understand divine love requires spending countless hours meditating on all of what the Scriptures say about love. The problem, as I have pointed out in the last few Bible class, is that all men are, by their fallen natures, suppressors of Truth. Most popular views of love end up as an amalgamation of some biblical truths mixed in with a lot of psychological presuppositions of what a pastor thinks love *must* be based on his life experiences. What I would like to do in this lesson is to look at what the Bible says about love, especially in 1 Corinthians 13, and ask you to examine your own life regarding divine love in your life. We all fail: none of us naturally loves others with the very love of God. The only ones who overcome their fallen natures are those who recognizing the problem and begin to make those adjustments that enable them to stop suppressing truth so they can love others as God instructs and become the kind of people that God desires. Consider the following:

1. Who does Christ say that we should love in Matthew 5:44? Loving always includes wishing the object of love the best. How many of your enemies do you pray for and desire their good?
2. Who does God say that we should imitate in loving others in Eph. 5:1-2?

3. Read 1 Cor. 13:1-2. This passage deals specifically with spectacular spiritual gifts that the Corinthians were using arrogantly. It certainly would apply to any gift or talent a person uses for his own arrogance. What is more important? showing off your gifts to others, like your IQ, quick wit, skills at making money, et cetera, or using that talent to care for others and glorify God? Do you find yourself mocking others instead of loving them? Do you find yourself comparing yourself with others instead of really caring about them? Do you find yourself more occupied with yourself and your abilities than for those around you in need? Or are you constantly occupied with yourself? Do you find yourself regularly griping and complaining at the idiocy of others because they are not as smart as you are? If you are really smart, do you think God gave you that gift so you could proceed to look down on others and mock them? It has always amazed me just how stupid and infantile some smart people can be: they are blind to just how ridiculous they act as they cut others down for “fun.” It does not seem to dawn on them that their intelligence could be better used to be able to understand and care/love for those they mock. However, they are too occupied with themselves and their talents and gifts than the needs and feelings of others. This is not why God endowed them with gifts, be they spiritual or natural gifts *from God*.
4. Read 1 Cor. 13:3. It may seem counterintuitive to think of someone giving up all possessions or sacrificing self without acting in love. However, people can and do give away their goods out of pride to win the applause of men. A deed may appear to be sacrificial while its real motive is for some human accolade—cf., terrorist who give up lives for their “*righteous cause*.”
5. Read 1 Cor. 13:4-13.
 - a. *Love is patient*. This is not patience in waiting in line to buy your *goods* at your favorite superstore. This patience would include the ability to bear injuries from others like personal attacks, slanders, or even personal injuries. This certainly would include power to forgive others. Failure to forgive others only creates more poison in the life of the one who has been wronged. Would you feel comfortable praying to God that He would forgive you as you forgive your debtors (Matt. 6:12)? Consider how dangerous this prayer could be for those who do not forgive those who hurt them in some way (debtors). To bear slander, insults, and hard criticisms requires an extraordinary measure of love. Christ was subjected to false charges all of His earthly life. He suffered frequently in silence as His enemies sought to destroy Him. Of course, there were times when He very forcibly castigated others, but only in defense of Truth. It never became a personal issue. He was not thin-skinned.

- b. *Love is kind.* The measure of your patience will be reflected in your kindness. Are you a kind person? Or do you find yourself lashing out and retaliating in kind to those who abuse you? Being kind to others is an application of the Golden Rule. To be kind toward others is merely doing to them what we would like them to do to us. To love someone is to be kind to them.
- c. *Love is not jealous.* Jealousy refers to envy, which is a violation of the 10th commandment and associated with idolatry in Colossians 3:5. It is out of jealousy that people are moved to steal, murder, slander, and a host of other crimes against humanity, cf. the actions of Joseph's brothers as well as his forgiveness of them (read Genesis 37:3-11; 50:20). It was jealousy that motivated the religious leaders to crucify the Lord Jesus Christ; read Matt. 27:15-18. Today we see how envy and jealousy has corrupted our entire culture as the poor are set against the rich, employees against employers, women against men.
- d. *Love does not brag and is not arrogant.* An axiom of our pagan culture is "If you have it, flaunt it." We see this attitude in sports, entertainment, politics, and religion, on the latter read Matthew 23:1-8. Bragging is the most obvious mark of pride. One can even be proud of one's doctrinal knowledge; read 1 Cor. 8:1-3. Knowledge without love just breeds more arrogance. True love always manifests itself in humility: humility before God that translates to man. In the context of the local church, we are display a love that prefers others to ourselves.
- e. *Love does not act unbecomingly.* A loving person is a polite person. The believer who has been transformed by the love of God is not a rude, selfish, pushy person. Believers are to treat all people with respect; read 1 Peter 3:8-9.
- f. *Love does not seek its own.* Note how divine/agape love strikes at the root of our selfish fallen nature. In our fallen nature we always want our way. Often, man may seek welfare of others as long as it does not conflict with his good. The greatest example of this giving love is found in Philip. 2:1-11.
- g. *Love is not provoked.* The Bible does not forbid anger, nor does it view anger as inherently evil. Both God the Father and Jesus Christ openly expressed righteous indignation; read John 2:13-17; Eph 4:26-27. The point here is that divine love is not hotheaded. The person who lives in this divine love is relaxed and does not fly off at the handle at everything that bugs him. Many believers are very angry

with God, which is reflected by their constant anger and bitterness. It takes very little to provoke such a believer.

- h. *Love does not take into account a wrong suffered.* It is easy to forgive and overlook a wrong suffered if you love them. However, if they are not objects of your love, you will not only take into account the wrong suffered, you will highlight it incessantly. Failure to forgive someone is simply failure to love them.
- i. *Love does not rejoice in iniquity.* One cannot live in supernatural divine love and rejoice in iniquity, sin, or evil because all of these things are against God. A believer who thinks that sin and evil are fun are not in a state of loving God or others. It is rejection of God that results in rejoicing in iniquity; read Romans 1:18-32. The world protests that Christians who oppose abortion (57 million dead since 1973) and gay marriages are “unloving.” However, true love rejoices in righteousness, not iniquity. Those who rejoice in iniquity, like promoters of gay marriage, do not possess divine love.
- j. *Love rejoices in the Truth.* Contrary to rejoicing in evil suppression of truth, true love rejoices in truth. As a matter of fact, there is an inseparable link between love and truth. God is not only the ground of love, but is also the ground of truth. Jesus Himself is the Truth; read John 18:33-38. We cannot love Him and at the same time despise the truth or consider truth of no great significance. Satan is the father of lies. He trades in untruth and does everything he can to distort, twist, or conceal truth. As we have seen in our philosophical realism studies, he has done a real job on Christians: most Christians are utterly pagan in the cosmological views of the world: they really do not believe God causes the sun to shine or the rain to fall or is in control of every bird that falls as per concurrentism—even though this is exactly what Christ taught, see Matt. 5:45 and Matthew 10:29. Without divine love, believers always suppress Truth, but just those truths of the Word that they do not like.
- k. *Love bears all things.* The Greek word here has the idea of “covering in silence.” The idea is that true love endures difficulties without complaining and whining. With love the believer always has a good attitude even during the most trying of times.
- l. *Love believes all things.* Obviously, this does not mean that the believer believes every single thing he reads or hears. We are not to believe in the lies of Satan. The point is that love believes all things spoken by God. In love the believer embraces all of the Word of God

as true. Without love, the believer will pick and choose his truths and with that he will pick and choose his view of God and style of Christianity. There is a great division among the human race: people who love God really love the Word of God; those who do not love God really do not love the Word of God.

- m. *Love hopes all things, endures all things.* Biblical hope is confident expectation. It stands in contrast to uncertainty found in the secular use of the word “hope.” Note how the power of love enabled Job to endure his great losses.
- n. *Love never fails.* Love, unlike temporary spiritual gifts, will never fail. As a matter of fact it will only grow throughout all of eternity. We are all like children now (1 Cor 13:9-12), but there will come a time when we shall see as Him as He is, *face-to face*, and in so doing love Him with a love indescribable and full of glory and forever and ever and ever and ever.
- o. *Now faith, hope, love, abide these three, but the greatest of these is love.* Paul concludes this section on agape love by linking it to the fundamental and great virtues: faith, hope, and love. Without faith it is impossible to please God; read Heb. 11:6. It is how we all come into the family of God. Faith simply means to believe, to trust. Hope is linked to faith. Having trusted God, we have eager anticipation of being with Him. Without faith and hope we are like ships without rudders, tossed to and fro with every wind. Paul does not denigrate faith and hope in stressing the supreme importance of love. As a matter of fact, the linking verb connecting faith, hope, and love is singular demonstrating their connection. Paul assures us that all three will never perish or shrink into insignificance. *But the one virtue that is elevated to the superlative level is love.* The whole point of it all is loving God and loving all that He loves. This is exactly what I have been noting at the beginning of every Bible class at FBC☺
Furthermore, note the eternal ramifications of divine love for the believer in the last verse of 1 Thessalonians 3.

*In 'Ehyeh,
Pastor Don Hargrove*