

The Spring I presented some significant insights I had discovered about love at one of our Prayer Meetings. Then at our marriage group for young couples I presented a slightly expanded version of those insights in Sept. I asked Josh a few weeks ago if I could present the full version of this message to all of you as part of our gospel culture series and he graciously agreed.

Over the next 40 minutes or so we are going to try to clarify **what exactly love is**, so that we can know when we are experiencing real love, and practicing it in our lives.

Prayer

Please turn in your Bibles to **1 Cor 13:12-13 (READ)**. This is the famous love chapter written in the middle of a discussion on spiritual gifts in the church.

Now what I want you to see are **three vital dimensions of love** found in these **two verses**.

Notice that it says that in the future when our salvation is fully realized we will see God **“face to face”**.

This personal encounter with the living God is further described to us in terms of **“knowing”**—do you see that in verse 12? Remember that these verses are located in a chapter all about love.

So what does knowing have to do with love? As it turns out—a lot! Listen to one of the top experts on 1 Corinthians and he confirms this connection between knowing and loving:

"Only here does any opposition or contrast between knowledge and love vanish away, for here knowing is shaped by being known, and love defines this mutuality- **Anthony Thiselton**, I Cor, p. 232

The three aspects of love that are related to knowing are:

- (1) We long to be **fully known** and yet fully loved (end of verse 12)
- (2) We long to **know another fully** and always delight in what we discover (middle of verse 12)
- (3) We long to be loved without the possibility of that love ever ending (vs 13)

What every human longs for in love is described in these verses.

The first is that...

1. **WE LONG TO BE FULLY KNOWN AND YET FULLY LOVED**

In other words, we long to be loved as we are, in spite of who we are.

To not have the one loving us withdraw as they discover the horror of sin, selfishness, and shame that is hidden within.

There is no one—NO ONE—on the planet who will love us this way! When we feel misunderstood or mistreated—When we get into conflict with someone else—When we discover something unsavoury about someone, the human tendency is to withdraw and create distance between ourselves and them. **We do this to others, and others do this to us.**

To love this way would require nothing less than a covering of all our sin so that the one loving us could delight in us without seeing any of our sin. Listen to these life giving words:

The LORD has taken away your punishment, he has turned back your enemy. The LORD, the King of Israel, is with you; never again will you fear any harm. On that day they will say to Jerusalem, "Do not fear, O Zion; do not let your hands hang limp.

The LORD your God is with you, he is mighty to save. **He will take great delight in you**, he will quiet you with his love, he will rejoice over you with singing.” **Zeph. 3:15-17**

First he removes our punishment (he covers our sin & shame). Then he delights in us. This is love my friends—the kind of love you won’t find anywhere else!

Only he can both cover our sins **completely** and delight in forgiven sinners **extravagantly!**

Being known by God is the first strand in our re-definition of what true love really is.

The second category or strand of love is described in 1 Cor 13:12:

2. WE LONG TO KNOW ANOTHER FULLY AND ALWAYS DELIGHT IN WHAT WE DISCOVER

This category has two further elements to it.

We long to deeply know another and not recoil in horror at what we find. We long to discover secret wonders, not secret garbage piles as we journey into another persons heart.

We also long to have the one loving us, to give themselves fully to us, without any secrets, without any holding back from us.

In other words we long to **delight in what we come to know** but also **have the one we love delight to show themselves to us**. We long for the mutual delight that comes as the lover discloses themselves to the beloved.

Have you ever met anyone like this? Don't we all, to a certain degree, **hide** from each other?

This is what sin has done to us—we don't want to be exposed because we feel shame as Adam did in the garden...**so we hide:**

But the LORD God called to the man, "Where are you?" He answered, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid." **Gen. 3:9-10**

Only God and the righteous angels have no sin. They have nothing to be ashamed of. And only God is infinite so that the discovery of knowing him will be a joy that will never end! We will forever know God in increasing measure:

Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. **John 17:3**

The New Testament scholar and expert on John's gospel, Don Carson expresses it this way,

"Eternal life is not so much everlasting life as personal knowledge of the Everlasting One" **Carson**, John, p.556

And just in case you think this knowing (& loving of God) is going to be limited and not as exciting as I'm describing it, listen to the words of Jesus on this matter:

"I am the good shepherd; I **know** my sheep and my sheep **know** me —just as the Father **knows** me and I **know** the Father — and I lay down my life for the sheep. **John 10:14-15**

Did you notice the words, “**just as**” in John 10:15? The relationship of the believer with Christ is described as a knowing that is *compared to* the way the Son knows the Father and the Father knows the Son! **Its a breath-taking knowledge.**

And this knowing is forever tied to his death for us. The giving of his life **for us** results in the giving of himself **to us**.

Later in **John 17**, this connection between God letting himself be known to us and His love being enjoyed and experienced by us is made clear:

“I have made you **known** to them, and will continue to make you **known** *in order that the love you have for me may be in them* and that I myself may be in them.” **John 17:26**

Again, Don Carson makes clear what is going on here:

“The intimacy of the sheep/shepherd relationship is grounded upon the intimacy between the Father and the Son” **Carson**, John, p.387

Do you see how incredible this is!? God discloses Himself to us in a way where the love that has existed for all eternity between the three persons of the Godhead is shared with us! He lets the infinite love with the Trinity spill over to believers!

This **being known by God and knowing God** are at the very heart of **what love is all about**.

The third strand that brings these two kinds of knowing together is:

3. WE LONG TO BE LOVED WITHOUT THE POSSIBILITY OF THAT LOVE EVER ENDING

This is one of the reasons we find funerals so hard. It seems to prevent this knowing and being known from continuing. It seems to abruptly stop something that was never intended to stop.

Love longs for permanence. This explains why the hook-up culture of this generation leaves people feeling so empty and restless. They hop in and out of bed with each other, like it was the same as eating one dessert too many:

“This is the way of an adulteress: She eats and wipes her mouth and says, ‘I’ve done nothing wrong.’ **Prov. 30:20**

Lust is by its very nature temporary and only satisfies in the moment.

He chose to suffer with the people of God rather than to enjoy the **fleeting** pleasure of sin. **Heb. 11:25 (NET Bible)**

Love by comparison is permanent. It never ends. Humans promise never ending love to each other regularly but only God is completely committed and faithful in the way that we all long for:

Many a **man** claims to have unfailing love, but a **faithful man** who can find? **Prov. 20:6**

Your **love** is like the morning **mist**, like the early dew that disappears. **Hos. 6:4**

Compare this with God’s promises to love us forever:

Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, yet my unfailing love for you will not be shaken nor my covenant of peace be removed,” says the LORD, who has compassion on you. **Is. 54:10**

The LORD appeared to us in the past, saying: “I have loved you with *an everlasting love.*” **Jer. 31:3**

God’s love is not some band-aid or bumper-sticker candy floss statement that has no weight to it—we are speaking about eternal realities and veracities—God did not just save us **from something eternally terrifying** (his wrath against sin) but saved us **for something eternally satisfying** (his everlasting love).

APPLICATION

I’d like to conclude this message with a couple of application points that will help us better develop a gospel culture of love in our church.

If love is all about knowing and being known, then some of us need to face the fact that our lack of deep involvement with other believers in this church is nothing less than a lack of love in our lives.

If you are a person whose only connection to the people of this church is on Sundays—if you think church is primarily an event that you attend with singing & a message—then you are missing out on something essential for your life.

Church is not just about attendance, but about building relationships of love that help each other become more and more like Christ.

One way we try to facilitate this in our church is in our **small groups**. We try to get into each others lives—knowing each other and allowing ourselves to be known—so that we can collectively grow together.

Our culture of love will grow when each person in our church has stopped hiding from others because of hidden sin and shame they feel that they don’t want discovered or to experience rejection over.

On a human level we are all hidiers. On a human level we reject others when we find shameful and sinful things lurking in their hearts. **But we have experienced something better than that from God.** God covers our sin & shame with Christ, and loves us extravagantly—freeing us to do the same with one another.

We love each other because he loved us first. **1John 4:19**

Because of the gospel and its sin covering wonder, we can know others and be known by them without hiding or withdrawing from sin. The cross is adequate to cover it all & allow us to love as we should—as we all long for.

So our first application is simply:

- 1. Prioritize time for small group participation in your life** (even though you are busy and tired)

To attend church but not get involved in the relationships of church life is like making pie but failing to bake it in the oven. A good start but misses the point! Like dating, but never getting married.

This is a commitment to grow in love.

For those of you who are committed to small groups and prayer meetings (there is nothing like praying together to bind people together relationally) this message has a challenge for you as well:

- 2. Personalize - Don't Theorize - the Truth.**

When we talk about truth together in abstract and theoretical ways, it's another form of hiding. We are not letting ourselves be known and letting the Scripture address our hearts.

So I encourage you to **practice confession** of sins in your group, so that others can **correct and encourage** you with the truth. Because this is what love is. We are not practicing Biblical love without this.

Last weekend I met a remarkable man. He was raised in a Christian home but left his home at 14 to live as a homeless person. He had been an alcoholic for 40 excruciating years...but 5 years ago a Christian family took him into their home and started loving him extravagantly. Today he is largely living in freedom.

I asked him why alcoholics feel much more comfortable in AA meetings than in churches. His answer was sobering. He said,

Every alcoholic knows that he can attend any AA meeting in the world and everyone else in attendance **is** or **has been** an alcoholic. Because of this there is a true "knowing" of the struggle, and a love and acceptance of the alcoholic.

He went on to say, "the church is full of sinners and should be the same with sinners who come in among them. They each each know the struggle of sin and what it's like to be defeated by sin, as well as how God forgives and helps them fight sin. **But I suspect most Christians have forgotten they are sinners and don't like to be reminded about the fact that is what they are.** If they forget they are sinners, they will have a hard time welcoming and loving sinners who visit them"

We gather in small groups as a way to help us not forget. Have you forgotten who you are?

Let's pray.

