

Introduction for May 16, 2010

The doctrine of love, for the Apostle Paul, is massive. His letters are weighty and solemn in their commands, appeals, and exhortations to love. One of the greatest chapters from his pen, I Corinthians 13, declares the character of love as a portrait of the Lord Jesus. Paul's application of Romans 1-11 in chapters 12-16 is built solidly on the foundation of what he terms genuine love. His word of choice that defines the character of God's love and the work of Christ in the New Testament is a word unique to the New Testament. Agape speaks of an act of giving, sacrifice and commitment on behalf of its object. It is not surprising that Paul's exhortation to the Roman Christians is centered in love. It is a debt that cannot be paid but a debt that is underwritten by God's massive treasury of love and mercy. In Romans 13:8-14, Paul reminds us that love recognizes the time in which the church finds herself and calls her to wake up. This call is not a gentle peck on the cheek but is rather a splash of cold water on the face to get her attention. Loving one's neighbor is the motivation for casting off the works of darkness and realizing that the day is at hand. For Paul, loving one's neighbor is not simply a moral platitude but is the result of loving God with all of one's heart, mind, soul and strength. Love dresses for war and goes out to battle to encourage and strengthen one's brother and sister in their growth in grace. This kind of love walks properly, putting on the weapons of light and the Lord Jesus, making no provision for the flesh.

This love is not wishy-washy, whimsical, or self-centered but it is the stuff of Christian maturity. Its fabric is spun from the very character of God and its design is strengthened with godliness in order to subdue the flesh.

Sadly, we live in a day when we dress for lust instead of for love. Instead of warring against sin we too often find ourselves embroiled in it. We have allowed the culture to determine the parameters and boundaries of love and propriety. Even our definitions of love have sunk to the depths of the sordid and vulgar rather than being raised to the heights of the throne of God. It must be our prayer and desire to know the love of God that surpasses knowledge, embracing its height, depth, length and breadth. The moral fatigue and spiritual laziness that we talked about last week is both real and troubling, however, the anecdote is the love of Christ shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit. Our tendency is to become either legalistic or antinomian in this matter of love. We must resist both temptations. Being filled with the Holy Spirit and saturated with the Word of God will enable us to love our neighbor as ourselves, thus fulfilling the law and avoiding the pitfalls of legalism and antinomianism. It is the responsibility of the church to go hard after God, saturated with His Word, resting in the finished work of Christ, walking properly as in the day, casting off works of darkness, putting on the armor of light and putting on the Lord Jesus Christ.

Will you hear the call to arms and stand fast in love or will you run the way of the culture and play the harlot under every green tree? Will you put on Elijah's mantle and tear down the altars of self-centeredness, lust and greed, or will you turn like Demas who loved the present world more than God and deserted the gospel?

Sweet Holy Spirit, give us ears to hear, eyes to see and hearts to obey. Come and quicken Your Word to our hearts and minds and stir us to a loving obedience.