

“Now these three remain” 1 Corinthians chapter 13 verse 13

One last word about love. Paul ends this section of his discourse about love with the words “Now these three remain: faith, hope and love – but the greatest of these is love.” It's not the only place that he makes this point. He does it with faith again when speaking about outward expressions of faith. He says “The only thing that matters is faith expressing itself through love.”

Have you ever met a person who has faith but has little love? It isn't pretty, to be honest. Such people are usually very certain and forthright about what they believe, and their interactions with others seem to be aimed at conforming them to their particular truth rather than offering them love and acceptance. They measure, and even judge others according to their own understanding of the bible and cannot understand why other people don't simply believe and behave exactly as they do. They may say things like “If the bible says it, that settles it,” and may even declare that they get on better with people in the world than they do with other Christians. Faith without love can become very demanding and judgmental. Faith needs love to constrain and govern it so that it blesses others rather than condemns them.

Love is also intended to govern hope. Christians enjoy the wonderful hope of eternal life after physical death. But that hope is supposed to be extended and offered to others. Without love it becomes a reason to look down with contempt from an elevated, privileged position on those who are lost.

So whatever we do in our Christian lives must be constrained and ministered in love, and that means in God's love, rather than ours, otherwise we will find ourselves disqualifying certain people from God's forgiveness on the grounds that what they have done is beyond forgiveness. God sent Jesus in love to die for the sin of the whole world because his perfect love has at heart the best interests of all people. God says of himself “Do I take any pleasure in the death of the wicked? declares the Sovereign LORD. Rather, am I not pleased when they turn from their ways and live?” and the New Testament says he is “patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.” No one is beyond the forgiveness of God in Jesus, and so we are called to extend the same opportunity to all to turn to God, regardless of what they may have done.

So the bible is clear that the principle characteristic that informs everything that God does is love, and as such it must be ours, too.

Prayer.

Father, so often we can, in our zeal and enthusiasm, find ourselves ministering your truth in ways that are judgmental and harsh. Please help us to be alive to the need to bring everything that we say and do under the bar of your love, so that we can know that we speak and act in the best interests and for the best good of others. In Jesus' name, amen.

All these devotionals can be found on our website inghamitechurch.org on the 'Resources' page. Click on the link to go there.