

Title: INVOKING THE BEST IN US, 1 CORINTHIANS 13
(Chatham, NJ; 02/07/16, AM) [Pc – Exegetical]

Theme: Love is not only the most excellent way, but it is also the way that exhibits the presence of God in the world.

Purpose: To explain that love is truly the most religious behavior, and to demonstrate what truly love looks like in practice.

Introduction:

1. Paul asks the Corinthians to choose not just what is good or better but what is best.
2. Philippians 4 exhorts us to focus on that which is excellent: think about these things, and do them.
3. By defining behaviors of love Paul exhorts us to choose the excellent, most Christian way of love.

I. Love Is Essential; Even Provocative, 1-3 (Paul silences, even shames, all those who elevate their God-given gifts above other people)

A. Tongues (1)

1. One of the charismatic gifts, a demonstrable show of the Holy Spirit's presence
2. Tongues are visible and may appeal to showiness: for the bearer, an obvious status symbol of God's blessing
3. Yet without love, tongues are nothing more than loud, meaningless noise
4. They don't even rise to the level of inspirational music

B. Prophecy and faith (2)

1. Prophecy to understand mysteries and knowledge
2. "Mysteries" has overtones of alleged pagan revelations, and though invested with different meaning in God's scheme of revelation, it would be somewhat prized because of the cultural significance
3. Knowledge – among our churches today, we prize knowing the truth which would elevate those with more education (Knowledge puffs up, 8:1)
4. "Faith to move mountains" – a characteristic even Jesus said was a worthy goal
5. Even aspiring these things, without love, "I am nothing"

C. Self-Sacrifice (3)

1. Giving away possessions and martyrdom are lofty goals of discipleship
2. Good works, benevolence, generosity, and self-sacrifice virtually define what it means to behave in a Christian way
3. These are things we are told to aspire to
4. Still . . . "if I have not love, I gain nothing"
5. Yet they are prone to self-righteousness and pride

II. Love Is: Effective Behavior, 4-7

A. Not comprehensive but addressed to the behaviors of the Corinthians

1. Love does not envy, but envy and strife characterize this church, 3:4
2. Love doesn't boast, but they do, 4:7, 5:6 (about immoral things!)
3. Love is not puffed up, but they are 4:6, 18-19; 5:2; 8:1
4. Love is not self-seeking, as Paul sought to model, 10:33
5. Love does not delight in wrongdoing, but they wrong and defraud each other, 6:7-8
6. Other clarifications of love:
 - John 15:13
 - Romans 13:10

- 1 John 3:16-18

B. Love behaves beyond what it feels

1. Patience and kindness are the first behaviors
2. The things “love does not do” or “is not” assumes also that love behaves appropriately (4b – 6)
3. Bears, believes, hopes, and endures all things

C. The nature of God reflected

1. The ethereal and lofty notion of God’s love becomes tangible in the lives of Christians
2. That love “endures” and “never ends” demonstrates that it reflects and participates in the very nature of God who lives and reigns forever and ever
3. Anybody and everybody can do this, even if they don’t possess the visible gifts of the Holy Spirit
4. In fact, love is more of a manifestation of God’s presence than anything else, John 13:35

III. Love Never Ends: Eternal, 8-13

A. Love is the greatest for a reason: it triumphs over everything, 13

1. Transitory pleasures tempt us; they satisfy our impulses and immediate needs
2. But love demands that we look beyond immediate gratification
3. Love is patient and it endures all things: love enables us to do better than give in to sinful, immature impulses
4. Even some of the spiritual gifts will end, but love continues on

B. Put away childish things, 11

1. “When I became a man . . . “
2. An insinuated rebuke: when you grow up, you behave differently
3. See Greitens, *Resilience*, 35 (copy); though he speaks of SEAL training and how it forms warriors (protectors, not blood-thirsty animals), the contrasts fit with the importance of growing up for any of us
4. The practice of love is the process of growing up.

Conclusions:

1. Love one another; it is the most excellent way.
2. Adopt these definitions and model behaviors.
3. God is love: he gave his Son.
4. This is reason enough to imitate him.