

1 Corinthians: The Body of Christ vs. A Body in Crisis

New Pilgrim Baptist Church Bible Study

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8/21/24

Unity over the Gifts of the Spirit (1 Cor 12-14)

“God’s Love: The Lifeblood of the Church” (1 Cor 13)

1. Love through power is meaningful but power without love is meaningless (vv. 1-3).

Paul begins his discussion of love, “the more excellent way” (12:31) by discussing some of the deeds of power he mentioned in the previous chapter. For a deed of power, a spiritual gift, to have any significance with God, it must be done on the basis of love. In this case, speaking in tongues, prophecy, discernment, faith, dispersal of resources, even self-sacrifice without love is meaningless to God. Our actions must be based in and motivated by love for them to have any real weight with God.

2. The primary characteristic of love is that it is other-focused, on God and other people (vv. 4-7).

Paul further explains love’s characteristics. In other words, one cannot claim love and define it whatever way he or she pleases. It is matched with other traits which all focus on devotion to God and real aid for people. It endures hardship, is kind, is not jealous, is not boastful, not conceited, not dishonorable, not selfish, not easily angered, does not think of evil things, does not rejoice in iniquity, loves the truth, bears others burdens, has faith, has hope, and endurance.

3. The only gift from God that will always remain, as it will transcend death, is love. The church needs it now and will always need it (vv. 8-13).

Love never fails. Paul means this both in the sense of how we use it and its eschatological significance. All other gifts are have import but only in this age.

Prophecy, tongues, even knowledge, will come and go. We will have no need of these gifts when “that which is perfect” has come. That is, when the Lord Jesus arrives, we will “know as we are known.” We will no longer need signs as our destination will have arrived.

The church needs faith, hope, and love. The church needs faith to trust God for God’s present activity among us. The church needs hope to see God fulfill his promises for his future work. But the church needs love to hold on to God and each other when we are weak in both faith and hope. Love is the binding agent that keeps the church together. When we are focused on God and how we might help each other, everything turns out the way it is meant to.