

Wednesday in the Word

Digging Deeper

May 5, 2021

1 Thessalonians 4:1-8

What is Love?

Kids say the darndest things. When asked about love, actual kids had these insights... "The rule goes like this; if you kiss someone, then you should marry them and have kids with them. It's the right thing to do"- Howard, age 8... "The law says you have to be 18 so I wouldn't want to mess with that"- Curt, age 7... "It's when you go on a date but if I was on a date I would run home and play dead. The next day I would call the newspaper and make sure they reported that I was dead"- Craig, age 9... "God decides it way before and then later you get to find out who you're stuck with"- Kirsten, age 10... "It's telling your wife she looks pretty even if she looks like a truck"- Ricky, age 10... "It's when you kiss a boy and you have to like it and you even have to clean up after him"- Anita, age 9. Ah, the wisdom of youth.

In our previous lesson we found that our love for the brethren is paramount but our love for all whom God created has to be displayed. He loves all people. We must do the same often with much difficulty. As the professional young love doctors above have made clear, love is often fraught with uncomfortable relationships but still quite necessary. Concerning marriage, these observations were made... "You can tell who's married if two people are yelling at the same kids"- Derrick, age 8... "If people didn't get married, there sure would be a lot of kids to explain, wouldn't there?"- Kelvin, age 8. Thank God for the depth of innocence and worldly understanding of these fine little citizens. Matthew 19:14. Perhaps they know the truth better than us sometimes. Paul spent chapter three digging into the love we share among our brothers and sisters. Verses 6-13. How and why did he turn such a radical corner in chapter 4? What interrupted his thinking? He opens with "Furthermore then we beseech you brethren...", then he dives in to abstaining from fornication, the lust of concupiscence, defrauding a brother, uncleanness and despising God. Good grief! What a spin off from all the love in the prior verses. He even changes gears again as he continues on in 4:9 back to brotherly love, peace and happiness! It's easy to lose track of your thoughts but that never happens in the Word of God. Godly love quickly gets sideswiped by sin and worldliness. Even the children get that. So, what of this bump in the road through Thessalonica?

Love at best is confusing and misunderstood. We, in English use one word to interpret what the Greek language offers us in seven separate, unique forms. Eros, Philia, Ludus, Storge, Philautia, Pragma and Agápe. Not all are used in the bible but this helps explain why God used Greek to describe His plan to us. We sinners seem able to flip from one form to another without flinching. In our seeking to love one another we may somehow misunderstand exactly what God's love looks like and insert an erroneous affection that He has forbidden. 1 John 2:15-17. So often, as we care for others and we try to uplift or aid them, our motives and intentions may drift from the agápe love we are in training to deliver. We may begin to have impure, selfish or emotional responses that do not fit with the Will of the Lord. Matthew 6:1, Proverbs 16:2, James 4:3, Philippians 2:3. Paul may have briefly redirected his letter to address those who allow their works to satisfy self or impress others. Many a "Christian" relationship has descended into sin and brought ruin to life, deceit to others and discredit to Christ.

On the other side of all this is the love that rises above that of the everyday. Many in the fellowship have gone well out of their way to go above and beyond the norm to give aid to those in need. We help brothers and sisters in miraculous ways and we help the unsaved as well. It's been said we are the hands and feet of Jesus, doing for those in need what they can't do for themselves. In this way they see the love of God lived out in life and our hope is that they may desire a relationship of their own with the Savior who loves them perfectly. Matthew 5:16. Some are easy to love. Some are not. Some hurt us deeply or fail us greatly and yet we find a level of love and forgiveness we never knew we could. Matthew 5:44. Some need us so intensely we lay down our very lives for them. 1 John 3:16. This is not a purely Christian trait. Even the unsaved can do some wonderful things for humanitarian reasons but our love should be far above that. We bear eternal life and are responsible for introducing this life to those who do not know it. John 4:35-36. What is love? It is the driving force in our life but if handled incorrectly it can develop into trouble. We see this in our text for today. Godly, well intentioned love can develop into sin because of the corruption of the flesh.

What is perfect love? It is agápe love. Selfless, other centered, sacrificial. Sometimes we succeed when we operate through the Spirit. Human love that is Godly can show in many varied ways. A parent agonizing over a sick child enough that they would trade their own health away to take the child's illness. A person standing and speaking for those who cannot speak for themselves, such as the unborn. A parent suffering from the sin of a wayward son or daughter whom they still deeply love. A person giving time or treasure to aid someone who cannot help themselves. A missionary putting life aside to bring the gospel to far away lands. A Christian sharing Christ with his persecutors. We are all capable of this deep and sincere love even in our fallen state. 1 John 4:7, 1 Peter 1:22. We are all charged with growing into this kind of love through the power of Christ. We are all able to turn away from lust, selfishness and personal glorification to devote our lives to glorifying our God and Savior Jesus Christ and we can demonstrate it by displaying His love to those He has created, loved and died for. As one young sage has put it, "Love is a hug that never lets go"- Robin, age 7.