

A More Excellent Way

1 Corinthians 13

Sermon One: A More Excellent Way Defended: Religion and Sacrifice

Opening ILL: Let me describe a person and then ask a question: Imagine a person who can preach...and I mean really preach. He tells the truth of God with passion, precision, and with ability that makes it seem like the Heavens are opening up and you are hearing the voice of something supernatural. Not only that, this person knows the Bible...well. He can quote book, chapter and verse and he can apply the truths of God's word to every circumstance. Not only that, but he has spiritual power. This person has the faith to risk great things for God and accomplish great things for God. Ok...not only that, but this person is generous. He would give you the shirt off his back and maybe even the undershirt or pants to match. Ok...not only that, but this person jumped in front of you and got hit by a car so that you didn't have to. He put himself in harm's way for you.

Here's the question: Do you think somebody like that would be an excellent Christian? Wouldn't you think that this person is the prototype for faithfulness? Wouldn't mimicking this person's behavior be the best way toward Christian growth and maturity?

I will show you a more excellent way. The person I described may be an absolute failure apart from the theme of our new study. Are you interested?

I. Introduction

A. How does this fit our theme for 2021?

1. You can't emphasize "Love and Good Deeds" without preaching about love.

B. Why call this series "A More Excellent Way?"

1. This is based off of 1 Corinthians 12:31

C. Why is love so important?

1. Love is the most important command in the Bible.

- a. **Matthew 22:37-38** And He said to him, "YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND. "This is the great and foremost commandment.

2. Love reassures our hearts that we are genuinely saved

- a. **1 John 3:19** We will know by this [love, v. 18] that we are of the truth, and will assure our heart before Him

3. Love covers a lot of our faults.

- a. **1 Peter 4:8** Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins.

4. Love is a fruit of the Spirit

- a. **Galatians 5:22-23** But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

5. ****One Bonus Reason****

- a. I would further argue that this theme is the great need of the moment.

i. **ILL:** "What the world needs now is love, sweet love..." I think it is actually true.

- a) Love your brothers and sisters in Christ—**John 13:34** "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another.

- b) Love your enemies—**Matthew 5:44-45** "But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on *the* evil and *the* good, and sends rain on *the* righteous and *the* unrighteous.

II. A More Excellent Way Than Religion (1 Corinthians 13:1-2)

A. What do you mean?

1. The Corinthians were fixated on the most extreme religious experiences.

- a. They were obsessed with the spiritual gifts.
- b. They were also, sadly, morally compromised (chapter 5)
- c. They were also, sadly, divided into schisms (chapter 3)

- d. They were also, sadly, selfish in the life of the church (chapter 11)
 - i. Some were so selfish that God killed them for being greedy with the Lord's supper!

B. A More Excellent Way than Religious Expression (v. 1a)

- 1. If I speak with the tongues of men and angels...wait...what?

Point: Hyperbole: what is it and why is the single most important thing in the universe (see what I did there?)

- a. Remember the context here:
 - i. The Corinthians were obsessed with speaking in tongues!
 - a) That is to say that they put great emphasis on people being able to supernaturally speak in languages they had never learned.
 - b) They understood this phenomenon to be proof that God had genuinely saved them.
 - c) They were wrong...on many points.
 - ii. It got to the point that their public meetings were just chaos.
 - iii. Paul, here, is saying that even if I speak in the highest human language
- 2. If I don't have love, it is just noise!
 - a. ILL: Charlie Brown's parents.
 - b. ILL: The gong and the cymbal.
Parents of little kids, how many of lay awake at night hoping your
 - c. kid will want to play the cymbals?
 - d. Point: We forfeit our right to speak in this culture if we don't show love.
 - i. Without moral authority, we forfeit the right to exercise spiritual authority.

C. A More Excellent Way than Religious Knowledge (v. 2a)

- 1. If I have the gift of prophecy and know everything.
 - a. The Corinthians were obsessed with supernatural, prophetic knowledge.
 - b. We may, also, measure ourselves by how much we know instead of how much we love.
 - c. What's the point?
 - i. People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care.
 - ii. God is not impressed with our learning if He is not honored in our loving.
- 2. If I don't have love, I am no better off by my knowledge!
 - a. Point: If somebody hates you, do you care if he has a PHD?
 - b. **1 Corinthians 8:1** Now concerning things sacrificed to idols, we know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge makes arrogant, but love edifies.

D. A More Excellent way than Religious Power (v. 2b)

- 1. If I have faith to remove Mountains...
 - a. Do you have that kind of faith? Prove it.
 - b. Do you want that kind of faith? Wouldn't that be awesome!
- 2. If I don't have love, I am nothing.
 - a. Even if you did have that kind of power, it wouldn't matter if you didn't love people.

Conclusion/Transition: How sad is it that there will be many people who seem so spiritual, so powerful, indeed...so faithful...who will be turned away from the Lord in judgement. Doesn't this give us pause in how we judge spiritual power and greatness?

Matthew 7:21-23 "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. ²² "Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' ²³ "And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.'

III. A More Excellent Way than Sacrifice (v. 3)

A. A More Excellent way than charitable giving.

- 1. Notice how Paul puts it—If I give ALL my possessions to the poor!

- a. You can't give more than everything you have!
- b. How would this even be possible apart from love?
 - i. Easy. It might be done to become famous like Ghandi.or one of those famous hermits!

Point: Read page 25-26(a) of C. S. Lewis, "The Weight of Glory"

- B. A More Excellent way than martyrdom.
 - 1. What more could someone give than to surrender their lives in service of someone else?
 - 2. How could such a sacrifice be anything but virtuous?
 - 3. Who is our example in this? Jesus
 - a. **John 15:13** Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends.

IV. To What does this Sermon Call us?

- A. Ask yourself this question, "Do I really love people?"
 - 1. Recognize your own personality and level of natural affection.
 - 2. Realize that love is important...chiefly important...and deal with your own heart.
- B. Spend some time this week with the Lord in prayer and ask Him
 - 1. To fill you with His Spirit and lead you into a more excellent way of love
 - a. In the church
 - b. In your family
 - c. In this world.