

March 6, 2010 Florida Hospital Seventh-day Adventist Church
1 Corinthians 13:11-12 Love Is All You Need: Grow Up by Andy McDonald

Today we continue our series on Paul's famous Love Chapter, 1 Corinthians 13. In just a moment we will explore 2 of the last three verses of this chapter.

How important, how critical these verses were to the Corinthian situation and to us today.

As David reminded us last week, context of this chapter helps us find its message for us today. While its this great almost poetic chapter of love what is the frame, the setting that makes these words stand out in their meaning for us today.

The Corinthians were a mess. When we read the whole of the book we get a sense of what was going on. Paul had established this church with a couple of refugees from when Claudius Caesar ordered all the Jews to be deported from Rome. Priscilla and Aquilla and Paul had their Jewish heritage and tent making trade in common and became friends and when they accepted the story of Jesus as Messiah they became fellow church planters in Corinth for a year and a half together.

After Paul moves on he eventually gets news about how things are back in Corinth. Some members of Chloe's household bring Paul disturbing news.

There are factions in the Church with different loyalty groups or almost like warring political parties each trying to gain control or power by allegiance to various leaders. So Paul addresses that issue.

Paul hears about their abuse of tolerance and freedom in Christ that there is a corrupt spiritual pride over a gross case of incest and Paul addresses there tolerance of open rebellious sin.

People who are fellow members of the body of Christ are taking each other to court. Demanding their rights. And Paul has to remind them to turn the other cheek, and accept injustice before, by their connection with the Body of Christ, they inadvertently drag the name of Christ into secular court.

Beyond those big messes the church had sent Paul questions about celibacy and getting married. What to do with unbelieving spouses when only one spouse converts to Christianity? Should new believers abandon their career, their station in society when they became Christians? Was it okay to eat meat offered to idols? What are the rules for worship? How should the Lord's supper be shared?

Finally most commentators agree that the Corinthians had elevated the gift of speaking in tongues as maybe the most important, the highest spiritual gift. Sort of a badge of "REAL" spirituality.

Paul affirms all the gifts and uses the body as an illustration that no gift alone is sufficient but it is the combination of all the gifts that make for a healthy church.

It is then that Paul moves to chapter 13. All the gifts are good but he introduces his next thoughts at the end of chapter 12—But let me tell you about something better than any of the spiritual gifts—a more excellent way—and we have the LOVE chapter.

Today we come nearly to the end of this famous chapter. He has said poetic almost sublime words about love. In verse 11 Paul does two things he reminds the reader that everything passes away, we move from stage to stage through life. We don't sit and play in the sand box sucking on a bottle speaking gibberish of an infant. We must move forward.

And in this Paul also calls us to grow up in relation to love.
What does it take to really love?

We say I love ice cream or some other favorite food.

A child loves a blanket or stuffed animal, or some other attachment.

We say we love our friends

We love our family We love our spouse.

God says he loves the world.

What do we really mean? What does it mean to grow up when it comes to love? What does it take to love?

In our culture we talk about people falling in love.

There are 1000's of stories and movies built on the premise that we "fall in love."

Now A fall has an element of being out of control.

When we hear about a friend who had a fall, we don't assume love but injury.

Fall's catch us off guard.

Whether a serious or minor fall each calls for some degree of recovery.

We don't plan to fall. Something trips us up and we take a tumble.

Professor Arthur Aron from State University of New York at Stonybrook has been exploring the dynamics of what happens when two people are "Falling in Love". In an interview he said that, "Contrary to what most people think, the statistics show that most people fall in love with someone that they have known for a while."

His research also seems to indicated that being very unattractive can be a road block in forming romantic relationships that being attractive doesn't help that much.

Aron, has found that two important characteristics are extremely important in the process of falling in love, and they are kindness and intelligence, and these two attributes are things we learn about someone from knowing them over time. Intelligence isn't just the kind we measure with IQ tests, but more of a self awareness kind of intelligence but KINDNESS is the strongest indicator for a long-term relationship.

What is Paul calling us to in these verses 1 Corinthians 13:11-12

It's like this : When I was a child, I spoke and thought and reasoned as a child does. But when I grew up, I put away childish things. Now we see things imperfectly as in a poor mirror, but then we will see everything with perfect clarity. All that I know now is partial and incomplete, but then I will know everything completely, just as God knows me now.

What does it take to mature in love?

This is a really important question for our church. We've adopted as our mission to "Love people into a life-long friendship with God."

It seems to me that if we have a ghost of a chance at fulfilling our mission it will call for us to mature in our love.

Jesus was clear that love was central to our connection to walking with him.

You may remember Jesus' response when an expert in religious law tried to trap Jesus by asking him which was the most important commandment in the law of Moses.

Jesus replied, "You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. A second is equally important: Love your neighbor as yourself." Matthew 22:37-39

Our Mission of "Loving People" can only be accomplished when we are clear that we love God.

Our Mission is one side of a two sided coin Love God is on one side and Love People on the other and we can never get to the Love People side until our lives are stamped with the clear reality that we love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength.

How do we get there? How do we grow up in our love for God so that we can extend ourselves in loving people?

We are so limited. Our love that is willing to lay down our schedules, our priorities, our preferences for the sake of one we love is, in too many of us, too childish. So what do we do? Grit our teeth and determine to love people no matter what?

David Benner writes, “My first response to the limitations of my love is always the same—to try harder. I pray for love with more fervor. And I try to love with more diligence. But nothing seems to change. Then I recall that once again I have got it all backwards. God doesn’t want me to try to become more loving. He wants me to absorb his love so that it flows out from me.” –Sacred Companions p. 34

This matches what he tells us in 1 John 4:19 says “We love because he first loved us.

Imagine the stupidity of a sponge trying to get something wet. Try as it might a sponge cannot emit what it hasn’t absorbed. You can wring it as hard as possible but it can only pass on what it has absorbed. It can’t make the moisture. It can determine to be damp. It can mean to be moist. It can wish to be wet. All the wetness it will have will be by absorption not wishing, meaning, determining or trying to make it wet!

Our mission is impossible; we can’t love people enough to have them become life-long friends of God unless we are letting him continually pour his love into our hearts through the Holy Spirit. Romans 5:5
Then it will just flow out of us like water from a soggy sponge.

Again Benner writes:

“If we are to become great lovers, we must return again and again to the great love of the Great Lover. Thomas Merton reminds us that the root of Christian love is not the will to love but the faith to believe that one is deeply loved by God.—Benner, Sacred Companions p.34

So how do we grow up in our love? How did it work in other areas of your life?

We come to love the people or even things to which we pay attention. All you married people think about that for a minute. At some point your spouse “caught your attention” and you began to pay attention to that person. I don’t care how charming, beautiful, handsome, winsome that person was if you hadn’t kept paying attention love would not have blossomed.

We’ve all read stories or watched a film about a person who notices another person and begins, not to stalk him or her, but begins to pay attention. And as the story develops the one to whom attention is being paid can hardly help paying some attention to the suitor, and abracadabra love blossoms.

I’ll never forget the pitiful dog my mom brought home one day. He wasn’t really a puppy but he was a young dog and he was pitiful. He was so ugly and covered with mange PHOTO no one wanted to be near him no less touch him. But my mother brought this pathetic creature to our home. She found out that there was a home treatment that would cure the mange. She would mix motor oil and sulfur together and rub this horrible mixture all over this dog. She named him Jobie after Job in the Bible who was covered with boils. What she did was pay attention to Jobie. This black and white spotted dog that hardly even a mother could love became a loved part of our family because mother paid attention to him. PHOTO

Now listen if you don’t have the love for God you wish you did start paying him more attention. What do you expect if you rarely talk, or think about Him, or seek his opinion, or find out what he likes and dislikes and how he operates, it is highly unlikely that the emotional attachment you equate with loving someone, it is highly unlikely that you will have much of that. But start reading about him, studying his ways—Think of him not just about him, gaze on him, get with him and just be still, focus on him, listen to him and these disciplines of loving attention will result in a love relationship with God.

How is God toward you? Seriously, from your perspective how is God toward you? What's his attitude about you? When you, in some moment of reflection, imagine God's thoughts toward you what are they like? Is there a smile or a frown? Is he pleased or constantly disappointed? Maybe the question is best asked—in your mind is he for you or against you?

It is our image of God that will either draw us to him or drive us away. Are we locked in some childish understanding or have we recognized his love and we are growing to maturity?

We can only catch little reflections. It's like we just catch little reflections of God in our fuzzy mirrors. The Corinthians were known for their mirror making industry. They weren't anything like our mirrors today. They were polished plates of metal in which you could see a shadowy reflection.

When I think about Jobie and mother and her investment and attention paid to that dog I get a little reflection of love. Its shadowy and sketchy but there is truth behind it.

I grew up on National Geographic. I'm pretty sure I didn't read an article in the magazine until I was an adult but I poured over the pictures as that magazine arrived at our home each month. I remember seeing pictures of the Grand Canyon. PHOTO But I must tell you that pictures, while they may be worth a 1000 words, pale into insignificance when you see it first hand. To not just know about it but to know the reality of the actual place.

I'll never forget driving up from Phoenix through the incredible red rocks of Sedona to Flagstaff and then on towards the south rim of the Grand Canyon. Along the way there were billboards advertising flights over the canyon, but the road from Flagstaff otherwise gives no hint of the grandness of what lies ahead. Parking in the lot at the South Rim we all left the vehicle and began to make our way toward the edge of the canyon. It was late in the day and the angle of the sun increased the

dramatic effect. But when we stepped to the edge we were dumbfounded. We went silent. Awed by the grandeur.

Let your imagination run as wild as it can. Gather all the images and thoughts and concepts and ideas your mind can hold regarding the Love of God. You can't imagine it better than it is. There is no ability of our finite minds to build up God's love, to inflate his love so that the reality would be a let down. No! When the reality is experienced face to face that new level of knowing will outstrip our most generous and what we imagine as exaggerated projection of love, as we know and are known.

God loves you. Not who you once were, not who you will become by his grace, he loves you!

God is patient with you. Since love is patient and God is love it would mutually exclusive for God to be impatient with you. He is long suffering toward you, forbearing, patient.

God is kind toward you. He is consistently kind. Even when our limited perspective causes us to perceive differently we must return to love—God is love and love is kind so God is kind.

God will not be with you jealous, boastful, proud or rude.

You can't make God irritable and if you perceive him to be so it is your perception that is off kilter.

Every time you've messed up, insulted God by your word, action or thought, He keeps no record of when he has been wronged. I don't know how to interpret the books of judgment being opened all I know is that God is love and love keeps no record of when it has been wronged.

If you suffer injustice God is pained by that and is never, NEVER glad about injustice.

No! It is his nature to throw a party, have a celebration, call for the choir to sing whenever truth wins out.

I don't know what your internal picture of God is but this is the way he has defined himself.

This is what he tells us it is like to know him, whom to know is life eternal.

God never gives up so that means he never gives up on you!
God never loses faith, so he won't lose faith in you.
God is always hopeful. When you are feeling hopeless know that isn't coming from the influence of the one who is always hopeful.
God will endure through every circumstance. At the end of the Great Commission Jesus promised, "I am with you always even to the very end of the age." In the highs and lows. When we are making God honoring choices and when we are living in open rebellion. He is with us enduring every circumstance.

Before I close I want to make this one thing really really clear.

If you don't remember anything else I've said today it is critical that you get this.

You can't love God, or your neighbor, your spouse or your children your friends or a stranger until you grasp the reality that God loves you.

When God looks at you it is like you looking at our kid. When God thinks of you love swells in his heart and a smile comes to his face. We may only see a poor reflection in a fuzzy mirror but it is there. He loves us with a love that is not dependent on our behavior. God loves you deeply, recklessly and extravagantly—just as you are. God knows we are sinners. Our sins don't surprise him or reduce his love for us in the slightest way.

Let me close by paraphrasing a quote from David Benner:

"We begin to love God when we know—not simply believe—that God loves us. When the thing about us that we most deeply know is that we are deeply loved by God, then we have taken the first step toward a heart knowing of God, and we have also taken the first step toward becoming genuinely loving of people." –Sacred Companions p. 33