

And The Greatest of These is Love

I've lately commented about the interrelationship of faith and hope, and how faith depends greatly upon understanding hope as "the confident expectations of good." But none of Eudora Welty's "defiant things of the Spirit" will work without "the greatest of these," Love. Faith "works by Love." Perhaps the one 'must memorize' scripture, other than John 3:16, is the Love passage in 1st Corinthians 13: 1-13.

Certainly, in studying this passage, one realizes how much more there is to the word love than is assumed by most people. In school one learns that there are at least four different kinds of "love", based on four root words dealing with it: These are "eros" physical "erotic love. The kind touted in most of the movies, also "philos," meaning brotherly love. Philadelphia carries that prefix in its "city of brotherly love" logo. Another root, "storve," means love among family members and close friends, and finally there is the God kind of love, "agape," or divine love.

From this one realizes that hanging the word "love," on all of the four above is to get pretty verbally loose. It might justify Tina Turner's question, "What's love got to do with it?" It's "a second hand emotion." I'm sure she's talking "eros" in that song.

The KJV translation in Corinthians 13 handles the problem by using the word, 'charity,' instead of the word love. Sadly, moderns usually link charity with just giving to the poor, so later versions fall back on love, and so will I here, but just to save space.

Jesus stresses the crucial need to understand that word; "A new commandment I give unto you, that you love ("agape"), one another as I have loved you. "By this they will know you are my disciples, by the love you show for one another." (John 13:36)

But let's for a moment scan some of the aspects of love as explored by Paul in his immortal 1st Cor. 13. In it he isolates love from many of the religious posturings and

practices that tend to complicate the simplicity that marks the true gospel of love and grace.

Some groups are much into “speaking in tongues,” but says Paul: “Though I speak with the tongues of men or of angels and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal.” i. e. noise. Others stress intellectual scholarship, but, says Paul, “though I have all knowledge and faith that moves mountains and have not charity, I am nothing.” I’ve found that some of the most academically elite churches are prone to stress intellect at “the expense of Spirit.” Truly “they have their reward,” but can be so clinically sterile that the only spirits moving there are church mice and the woodworms in the pews. When The grieved Holy Spirit is left knocking at the door, the service has no “anointing,” and seems more open to sleep than to any spirit-led move of God. Again, I’ll quote Yeats: “For intellect no longer knows/ *IS* from the *OUGHT* or Knower from the known./ That is to say, ascends to Heaven.”

Simply put, if love is not the motive for the “good work” or worship service, or personal sacrifice, it’s vain self promotion, and “Love seeketh not his own.”

Some groups promote prophecies as proof of their righteousness. But Paul insists that without love, they too “shall fail.” So few of the unique doctrines that separate sects amount to much without love. For their vision is “through a glass darkly,” lacking the love that would bring them “face to face” with the light of truth. Now “they know in part, but then, (with love) shall they know even as they are known.” Certainly with the catalyst of love, we shall see Him “face to face” as He is, “for we (His children), shall be like him.”

So what’s the big deal about love? “God is Love.” Love brings “the purification of our motives/ In the ground of our beseeching.” (T. S. Eliot) If we act out of love, we are acting as God’s children, which we are. But wrapped in the darkness and deception of sin, we cannot look on God and live. Moses could only look on God’s

back side. And he came down from Mt. Sinai so radiant the people couldn't look on him.

So Tina, Love has everything to do with it: "For God so loved the world, (us), that He gave His only begotten son, that whosoever believes on Him, shall not perish but have everlasting life. (John. 3:16 KJV)

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