

Week 2: The Priority of Love

Key Verses:

1 Corinthians 13:13

¹³ And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

John 15:9-11

⁹ "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. ¹⁰ If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love. ¹¹ I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.

Idea:

The key characteristic that Jesus says exemplifies and defines his true followers is not doctrinal purity or moral obedience or faithful preaching of the Bible (as important as these are), but the deep and obvious expression of God's love among them. Not only is deep, agápē love the defining sign to outsiders that we are God's people, but it is also the essence of the church's experience of God's presence in its midst. [Page 18]

Reflect:

- If you had to pick one word to describe the Christian's that you know, what would you use? Would it be love? Or perhaps something else.
- Read 1 Corinthians 13:4-7. The Bible now gives us a full definition of love. Read through these qualities carefully. Which of these qualities do you struggle with the most? Which do you think your church needs to address the most? How does this biblical definition of love differ from the popular understanding of love within society?
- Read 1 Corinthians 13:8-13. If love is the greatest quality of all, how should this be reflected in the life of your church? For example, what impact should it have on the church's programs and ministries?
- Read John 15:9-11, preferably in several different translations. Firstly, what is the significance of the word that is translated as "remain" or "abide" or "dwell"? Secondly, what is the link between love and joy in this passage? How does one affect the other?
- How have you recently gone at "remaining" or "abiding" in God's love? What are the encouragements and challenges to this in your life?
- David encouraged us to write a love letter from God to ourselves. God is love and he loves each of us deeply – this exercise can help us to see just how God sees us (even with our brokenness). Remember it's not a job reference, but a love letter. The best place to draw inspiration from is Scripture, what does God say about us (and you!). Romans 5:8, 1 John 3:1, Ephesians 2:4-5, Isaiah 54:10.

Pray:

- Spend some time praying about these issues. Pray for yourselves, for your small group and for your church – that God's love might be more powerfully and tangibly manifest among you.