The Greatest of These Is Love

1 Corinthians 13:13

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

In AD 50, Corinth was one of the most important commercial cities in the area. It was also heavily saturated in Greek culture, its idolatry, and immorality. Paul spent 18 months there setting up a church. After he had left, he received disturbing reports that the church was having problems with immorality, division in the church, and the Greek culture affecting the early church’s religious beliefs. Paul wrote a letter to the church, which became 1 Corinthians while ministering in Ephesus and he wrote it to try and correct some of the practical and doctrinal and problems they were encountering. As we heard last week, the early Corinthians were placing a large emphasis on and taking pride in spiritual gifts such as tongues, prophecy, and knowledge. It is in this letter that we see Paul emphasizing to the Corinthians the very heart of Christianity - faith, hope, and love. This threefold combination is seen throughout the New Testament and here God was talking not only to the church but also to the Corinthians as individuals.

1. Faith – This is a subject that was featured in a lot of Paul’s writings.
   1. Faith is not a blind leap in the dark, but it is a confident leap into the arms of God. Often the end in not in view when this leap is made, but the landing is never in doubt! Faith has the capacity to see what the eyes cannot see. It is the knowledge that God is in absolute control and is working in all situations.
   2. There is only one life that pleases the Lord and that’s a life lived in faith. The secret to experiencing and enjoying all the best that God has to give you is to turn your life over to God, place it in His hands and live it His way.
   3. Faith demonstrated – Abraham, the centurion
2. Hope – What is hope? The dictionary defines it as “the feeling that what is wanted can be had or that events [will](http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/will) turn out for the best”. Biblical hope is different. It is “a confident expectation which rests upon the promises of God.” Put another way, it trusts that God’s Word is true and can be believed.
   1. Genuine hope is not wishful thinking but knowing what God has promised will come to pass.
   2. It will be fully realized with two wonderful things: 1) His return 2) Heavens’ reward
   3. Hope is something that is very difficult to separate from faith, as the two are essentially linked.
   4. Faith is the key that opens up God’s promises, but hope is the instrument by which we hold onto them.
3. Love – Genuine biblical love is a rare asset in this world today. There are plenty of examples of fleshly and worldly love, and the word love seems to be carelessly tossed around. Paul explains the character of real love earlier in verses 4 – 7. 4Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud.5It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.6Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.7It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.
   1. When Paul wrote these verses, he shared what love produces in us.
   2. People can act without acting out of love, but it is impossible to have love and not to act.
   3. Faith and hope are important, but Paul emphasizes that this one is the most important of all.
   4. At the coming of perfection, imperfect understanding disappears and the spiritual gifts will be no longer needed. What will remain is love.

Paul knew that the Corinthian church contained many qualities but were lacking in these three areas. Faith, hope and love are the essentials and cannot exist without the others. We need the faith to believe, the hope to endure and the love to make it meaningful. The same qualities that Paul looked for in the church in Corinth, God looks for in our church and our lives as individuals today. I want to challenge you to look at 1 Corinthians 13 during this week and reflect upon it. Pursue this love and involve yourself in something far beyond the ordinary, delight in this wonderful gift and participate in the grace of God himself.

Now may the Lord of peace

Give you peace at all times

And in all ways.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ

Be with all of you.

2 Thess. 3:16, 18