As believers, we talk a good game, but are very short on delivering the goods (1 John 3:18). This is a frank discussion on just how inept we are at being the body of Christ. You would think we were asked to do the impossible, and in a sense, we are. But this ineptness is a result of our inability to focus on any one thing at any given time. In our distractions, we have become consumed by the shallow and unimportant at the expense of the fundamental and indispensable.

Somehow we place loving God, one another, and then our neighbor in opposition to everything else when in reality, loving God, the church, and our neighbor is where “everything else” begins and ends.

In the absence of this one thing, nothing else matters, and in the presence of this one thing nothing else matters. For example, holiness without love is cold legalism, and love without holiness is unstable emotionalism. When the early church was imploding over spiritual gifts and personality cults, Paul called them back to the biblical idea of love in 1 Corinthians 13.

Biblical love, Christ-like love is so self-effacing that often it is unseen and unappreciated by those who are the recipients of it. But love we must. We need to move the word “love” from one of a static existence to that of a life altering, Christ manifesting action. Let us reflect on the following statements from the New Testament that unpack for us the nature of biblical love.

I. Love seeks to do good to the un-loveable (Matt. 5:43-48).

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus communicates information depicting heaven on earth. If we struggle with the simple admonition to love our brothers and sisters in Christ, how will we love the un-loveable? Yet, Jesus clearly and openly loved those who were directly involved in His malicious and violent crucifixion (Luke 23:24 [“Father forgive them”]).

Biblical love, loves without reciprocation. It is possible to give love without receiving it back in return. From a human perspective such loving is supernatural. Such love can only exist when God’s love flows through us to others. Such love is impossible in the absence of God.

II. Love is so singular and passionate that it holds only one object as the focus of its most intense expression (Matt. 6:24).

It is for this reason we are told to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength (Mark 12:30). From this singular idea flows all other affections (Matt. 22:39). It is for this reason Jesus would say, “Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (NIV Matt. 6:21). This is the reasoning behind the statement, “If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple” (Luke 14:26). All other “loves” in comparison to this love are of no comparative consequence.

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III. Love for one’s neighbor is missional, whereas love for one’s brother is familial (Matt. 22:39).

In Luke 10:25 and following, Jesus seeks to answer the question, “Who is my neighbor?” The answer’s inclusive nature as to anyone in need rubs open a cloistered culture. Neither love for one’s neighbor, nor love for one’s brother, are optional expressions. Both flow from a primary and singular love for one’s God.

Every problem that exists in any relationship is solvable if biblical love for one another exists. All local church problems are resolved with this one idea. Why is love such a powerful peace maker? Because love covers a multitude of sins” (1 Pet. 4:8). It would seem in light of our present study, love is lacking in most local assemblies. This is to our shame.

If we could but love God first, then from that singular love will flow a consequential love for one another and our neighbors. A lack of love for each other is simply an indication that we do not love God. No matter how hard we might argue to the contrary, in the absence of a love for our brothers and sisters in Christ, we do not love God (1 John 3:10, 11; 4:7, 8, 19-21).

IV. Love’s reception is proportionate to the unworthiness of the object loved (Luke 7:36-50).

When we see our own unworthiness and begin to accept our own inevitable condemnation, then mercy and grace as expressions of His love are received with a deep sense of humility and gratitude. The shallowness of our own love’s expression speaks poorly of how we view our own worth. Because we fail to see ourselves for what we are, we fail to see the magnitude of God’s love expressed in favor granted and punishment withheld.

V. Love’s greatest demonstration is in the Son, being sent by the Father, taking on human flesh and dies the shame filled death of the cross to secure for His people an eternal redemption (John 3:16).

This text describes mankind as a weak, wicked, and warring group that stands in need and in direct opposition to God. Despite his condition, God made him the object of His love, and in so doing secured for him deliverance from an eternal separation and bequeathed to him His eternal presence.

It is His love for us that give us the picture of what our love for one another looks like (Rom. 15:7; Eph. 4:32; 5:2, 25). His love initiates our love (1 John 4:10, 11, 19). It is the Holy Spirit working in us and through us His love so that others might be loved (Gal. 5:22). In the absence of Him first loving, we would never love Him or any one else (2 Thess. 2:13). It is His love that moves us to act (2 Cor. 5:21). Once we are in the clutches of His love, there is nothing that can remove us from being the object of His affection (Rom. 8:31-39).

The greatest manifestation of Christ to the world and to one another is in loving one another without condition, without requirement, without limit, and without reward. Until this happens we will continue to stumble in our pursuit of Christ and His church. Yet when it does happen, the world will not be able to resist the pull of His loving embrace. May God open to us this most endearing expression of who He is to one another.