

Daily Readings

Please note: This week we continue our study of the book of Acts. Read and reread each passage to get a sense of the total dependence these early followers gave to the Holy Spirit.

Monday, May 25 – Read Acts 9:32-43. This section includes the stories of the healing of Aeneas and Tabitha (Dorcas) coming back from the dead. In each case it is Peter who prays over these persons. Scholars note that these “signs and wonders” seem to be out of place in the book of Acts. Luke is establishing the faith and authority of Peter for the task that is before him. In the next section, Peter hears the word from God to include the Gentiles. In what ways has God prepared you for some great work?

Tuesday, May 26 – Read Acts 10:1-23. The Holy Spirit sets up the inclusion of the Gentiles in miraculous fashion. Peter is given a vision of unclean food to eat. In the vision, God commands Peter to eat the food three times saying, **“What God has made clean, you must not call profane.”** At the same time, the Holy Spirit instructs Cornelius to send for Peter. Cornelius (a gentile) follows the command of the vision and sends for Peter. Neither man understands what God is doing as the stage is set for Peter, a Jewish Christian, and Cornelius, a Gentile believer, to meet. In what ways in your life has God been working without your knowing to accomplish his work or to teach you a lesson about life?

Wednesday, May 27 – Read Acts 10:24-48. Now Peter and Cornelius meet. Typically Peter would have rejected Cornelius’ invitation because of the fear of coming in contact with some who was unclean. Peter accepts the Gentile Cornelius because of the vision and message given to him by the Holy Spirit. Peter shares the gospel with them, and they not only believe but are blessed with the presence of the Holy Spirit like on Pentecost. Peter is now convinced that Gentiles are to be included into the church without regard to the ritual and food laws. In what ways do we reject others today because we consider them unclean?

Thursday, May 28 – Acts 11:1-18. The story continues with the leaders and Christ followers in Jerusalem getting word of what has happened with Peter and Cornelius. They immediately condemn Peter for eating with these uncircumcised Gentiles and summon him for a meeting and explanation. Peter meets with them to tell them about the vision, the meeting with Cornelius, and the blessing of the Holy Spirit like on Pentecost. All are amazed and see this as a sign that God wants them to reach out to the Gentiles. What group do you believe God is calling us to reach?

Friday, May 29 – Read Acts 11:19-29. In these passages, Luke tells us how God uses the scattering of those persecuted to spread the gospel. This section ends with the inclusion of Barnabas and Saul in the offering for the Jerusalem church. How is God using difficult situations to accomplish God’s will for this world?



TRIETSCH

STUDY GUIDE & DAILY READINGS

Sunday, May 24, 2009

Theology of Twitter (Week 2 of 3)

The Real Connection

1 Corinthians 13:1-7, 13 *The Word from the Bible (Today's New International Version)*

If I speak in human or angelic tongues, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body [to hardship] that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

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

1 Corinthians 13:4-7 *The Word from the Bible (The Message, a paraphrased version of the Bible)*

Love never gives up.

Love cares more for others than for self.

Love doesn't want what it doesn't have.

Love doesn't strut,

Doesn't have a swelled head,

Doesn't force itself on others,

Isn't always "me first,"

Doesn't fly off the handle,

Doesn't keep score of the sins of others,

Doesn't revel when others grovel,

Takes pleasure in the flowering of truth,

Puts up with anything,

Trusts God always,

Always looks for the best,

Never looks back,

But keeps going to the end.

This is great advice for the church. Maybe we should write these words on the wall or on our sign as instructions for all our work and ministry. Further, think about the condition of our world and how it would look if everyone behaved in this manner. This rendering of verses 4-7 is a high standard for us.

1 Corinthians 13:1-7

Previously in this letter to the church at Corinth, Paul emphasized the special services rendered by many different persons for the common good of the whole church. For Paul, love is the supreme gift of the Spirit which marks the church as the body of Christ. Every person in the church brings something unique and different for the church's ministry, but everyone is called to love.

Chapter 13:1-3. Paul likens Christians who speak in special tongues yet lack love to a noisy combination of instruments used during pagan festivals. He does not discount prophecy, any more than intense faith and self-sacrifice, but he considers each of these valueless without love.

Chapter 13:4-6. Paul finds it easier to write about the attitudes and actions which love avoids than to define its qualities. When he does speak positively, he joins two fruits of the Spirit — patience and kindness (see Galatians 5:22). Possibly he conceives of kindness as the active counterpart of patience. Here he must be thinking of a Christian's typical actions as reflecting God's actions toward all people (Romans 2:4; 9:22; Matthew 5:43-48).

Many commentators have suggested that the traditions concerning Jesus inspired Paul's description of love. We know the church in Corinth was contentious and divided. This disorderly situation in the church at Corinth certainly influenced Paul to speak of love as the supreme measure of our actions together. He chose his words to rebuke the arrogant and self-important persons in the church who were behaving so shamefully toward others.

The verb translated *bears* in 13:7 has been used earlier in 9:12b, where it is translated *endure*. In this context, the primary meaning is *cover*. Paul's thought may be that love keeps confidential the faults or mistakes of others, not wishing to make a public issue of them.

In the Greek, *believes* is the verbal form of *faith*, and *endures* has the sense of standing one's ground. The repetitious *all things* can also mean *always*. Perhaps, therefore, Paul's meaning is: *"Love keeps under wraps shameful deeds (so long as there are possibilities for repentance and forgiveness): love always possesses faith, always hopes, always remains steadfast."*

The use of Divine Love (agape in Greek) in the New Testament

The use of the Greek word *agape* or *divine love* in the New Testament is less common than one would think. Acts has one example, and Titus has none. The verb *to love* is more frequent than the noun, of which there are no occurrences at all in Mark, Acts, Titus, James or 1 and 2 Peter.

The use of the term *divine love* among the New Testament writers breaks down in the following manner: 10 percent of the usage are found in the words of Jesus; 41 percent are found in the letters of Paul; 33 percent are found in John's gospel and three letters; and the remaining 16 percent is spread throughout the rest of the New Testament. It is significant that John, who accounts for one-tenth of the New Testament, provides one-third of the references to love.

For that reason, any discussion about the importance of love requires looking at what John has to say. In 1 John, we get the best picture of his philosophy of love.

1 John 3:16-24

This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for one another. If any one of you has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in you? Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue, but with actions and in truth.

This is how we know that we belong to the truth and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence: If our hearts condemn us, we know that God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything. Dear

friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God and receive from him anything we ask, because we keep his commands and do what pleases him. And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us. Those who keep his commands live in him, and he in them. And this is how we know that he lives in us: We know it by the Spirit he gave us.

John tells us that when it comes to expressing love, feelings and words aren't enough. Love is an action. Love is something you do. Love is treating another with kindness, respect, encouragement and help.

What does this mean, and why is it important to the Church?

Two major functions of online social networks (such as Twitter and Facebook) are like the church and can be used by the church.

1) These online communities connect people. While at first some of the posts seem narcissistic, the primary function is to bring people together into relationship. There are thousands of stories of how friends have found each other after years of being apart. In the 21st century complex culture in which we live, maintaining relationship is a challenge. Keeping community is even harder. The church should also stay connected throughout the challenges of this culture. The difference is that the church offers a much deeper and meaningful relationship to its body. We can use these social networks to be what God has called us to be.

2) Because these social networks use real-time technology, the exchange of information is easy and fast. The church is challenged by our once- or twice-a-week contact. No longer do we live in rural agricultural communities where everyone tends to share everything. Our lives are spread all over the world. We share little. As the church of Jesus Christ, we need to regain the sense of sharing our lives together (not just an hour or two a week). Social internet networking can help us stay in touch and connect.

Make no mistake, these networks are not a replacement, but they can be a tool. They show us we can stay connected real time. The can now move more at the speed of life. We can better be the people God is calling us to be – "those who love one another."

For More Information

The following are links to articles and sites where you can find more information about Twitter and the church. The content of these articles are solely the responsibility of the authors.

- The Twitter "how to" blog — www.twitter-howto.com
- The Amount and Value of Twitter Traffic (a blog post) — www.techcrunch.com/2009/03/12/the-amount-and-value-of-twitter-traffic/
- "People Try Twitter One Month, Then Fly" — www.pcworld.com/businesscenter/article/164048/people_try_twitter_one_month_then_fly.html?tk=synd_macworld
- Twitter Backlash (The Anti-Tweet Blog) — twitterbacklash.squarespace.com
- Church Solutions' Pros and Cons on Twitter — www.churchsolutionsmag.com/articles/3-reasons-every-pastor-should-use-twitter.html and www.churchsolutionsmag.com/articles/2009-american-idol-twitter-catalyst-west.html
- Time Magazine article about Twittering in Church with the Pastor's OK — www.time.com/time/business/article/0,8599,1895463,00.html
- Twittering in Worship (from a United Methodist site) — www.gbod.org/worship/default.sp?act=reader&item_id=47649