

Lake Cities Community Church
Pastor Craig Schill
April 10, 2011
Series: 1 Corinthians: Growing Up! Building Up!

A More Excellent Way!
1 Cor 12:12 – 13:13

Can I please have the following people stand if they are present, and remain standing:
Tammy S. Jim and Laurel P. Micah and Rhonda F., Jon and Elyce L., Mac and Debby D., Jenny M.,
Malcolm and Kathi M., Mark and Lisa T. and Kevin and Laura S.

What these people have in common is that they were all a part of a meeting that occurred on Sunday night, September 24, 2006. This was the very first meeting of the “core group” who seven months later (along with a few other families), on April 8, 2007 would launch Lake Cities Community Church.

Before you sit down - Do you remember the passage of Scripture I shared with you on that night? For the past several months as our fourth anniversary was approaching I have thought back to that very first meeting of the core group, and I remember how important I felt it was for my very first words to communicate something important.

John 13:34 “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. John 13:35 “By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”

Here were the actual first words that I spoke to the group who would eventually found this church: “This is a big moment – a milestone. The first step, the start the beginning, Lord willing, of our new church. I’ve thought about the first thing that I wanted to say to you, as

your pastor. And the first thing I want each of you to hear is..."I love you." I love you and I desire Christ's love to characterize us as a church."

That has been my desire from day One, and it continues today. Because if we minister, and serve and work, but do not have love for one another we have missed the entire POINT of the Christian faith.

A church without love is like a restaurant without food.

It is like a school without teachers

Or a lake without water

A church without love is like a song without music

It is like a joke without laughter

Or a flower without fragrance

Jesus wanted his disciples to know that the defining characteristic of the church was the love one person had for another. I have often said that besides your family, the church is the only place in society I know of where you are required to love one another. At the Rowlett Chamber of Commerce, where I serve on the Board of Directors, I can assure you there is nothing in the membership agreement that members have to love one other. In the workplace employees are expected to be professional, civil and respectful toward one another, but "love" is reserved for your personal life, not your professional life.

But Jesus says it is central to your church life. Lake Cities Community Church operates around four purposes – Worshiping the Lord. Growing on our faith, Loving one another and Sharing the Good News All four purposes are, in one sense equal, but in another sense each is

distinctive. Worshiping, for example, is the only purpose that continues past this life – and so we list it first in terms of priority. Sharing our faith captures the heart of the Great Commission and gives our church its mission or reason for being. Growing spiritually is equally important – it is linked to worship as we respond to God’s word and to sharing as we grow new believers into disciples- it is the fruit of church ministry.

BUT without love **NONE** of the other purposes matter. Without love, evangelism is ineffective. Without love, our worship is an offense to God. Without love, spiritual growth is stunted. Love is like setting all the clocks to Greenwich Mean Time... It is the standard for all the others. All the other purposes of the church find their identity and in the concept of love.

So turn with me of 1 Corinthians. Our text this morning is chapter 12:12 through the end of chapter 13. And in this section Paul makes his strongest argument for the priority of love. This is the climax and crescendo of the book so far.

Paul’s argument is - first – that if you don’t place love as the controlling value of the church the consequences will be **incredibly devastating**, and, second, if you do act according to love, the results will be **spectacularly beautiful**. And this choice has been put before all congregations throughout church history, and comes to us this morning.

1) INCREDIBLY DEVESTATING CONSEQUENCES (If Love is Not the Controlling Value)

Let’s begin with the negative. What if we run the church according to something else besides love? (and that is easy to do). And we are not talking about bad things either. For example, we have already seen that in Corinth, some wanted to run the church according to Knowledge.

You might remember that Paul dealt with this in chapter eight in respect to the meat sacrificed to idols. Those who were eating meat KNEW that idols were not real, and that the meat was OK to eat. And they were using their correct knowledge to run roughshod over the other believers who were honestly struggling with the issue. Paul said: [1Cor. 8:1](#) Now concerning things sacrificed to idols, we know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge makes arrogant, but love edifies. [1Cor. 8:2](#) If anyone supposes that he knows anything, he has not yet known as he ought to know; [1Cor. 8:3](#) but if anyone loves God, he is known by Him.

If you run the church according to knowledge the **devastating consequence** is *arrogance and division*; where people are driven away from the Lord. Now knowledge is not a bad thing. I have two-master's degree and knowledge serves an important purpose. But if I tried to pastor the church by bullying you with my knowledge the church would suffer. And unfortunately, this is the exact mistake many seminary graduates make. And this is what they were doing in Corinth.

When knowledge serves the church it is a humble helper,

When knowledge leads the church it is a prideful tyrant.

In addition to running the church according to knowledge, the Corinthians also tried to run the church according to **who was the most gifted**. It is also a serious problem we have in the modern church today. Remember back in chapter one? [1Cor. 1:11](#) For I have been informed concerning you, my brethren, by Chloe's people, that there are quarrels among you. [1Cor. 1:12](#) Now I mean this, that each one of you is saying, "I am of Paul," and "I of Apollos," and "I of Cephas," and "I of Christ." [1Cor. 1:13](#) Has Christ been divided? Paul was not crucified for you, was he? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?

Running the church according to gifts divided the Body of Christ. Apollos had a great gift of teaching, and was considered one of the most eloquent voices in early Christianity. Paul had the gift of apostleship, and God was working in Him to literally create the body of Christ all over the world. And people in the church said, "Let's organize the whole church around these gifted people!" And it led to great conflict.

And, again, unfortunately, today, mostly the American church organizes itself around the person who is the most gifted, talented or charismatic. And the personality or gifting of the leader becoming the highest order for the group, rather than love. And that is not to take away anything from gifted people – gifts and talents are a blessing to the church, but it is like those picture stations where you have a cut out for the head, and you stick your head over someone else's body – If Christ is removed and you want to be the head instead, it might be good for a laugh, but nothing else.

At the beginning of Chapter 13, Paul points out the limitation of running the church according to spiritual gifts. [1Cor. 13:1](#) If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. [1Cor. 13:2](#) If I have *the gift of prophecy*, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. [1Cor. 13:3](#) And if I give all my possessions to feed *the poor*, and if I surrender my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing.

We cannot run the church according to knowledge or gifts or anything beside's love. Earlier, in chapter twelve, Paul used the image of the body to illustrate his point. [1Cor. 12:15](#) If the foot says, "Because I am not a hand, I am not *a part of the body*," it is not for this reason any the less *a part of the body*. [1Cor. 12:16](#) And if the ear says, "Because I am not an eye, I am not *a part of the body*," it is not for this reason any the less *a part of the body*. [1Cor. 12:17](#) If

the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? verse 21...[1Cor. 12:21](#) And the eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you”; or again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.” Gifts are great, but they are not the way that God **values the body**. When gifts and talents are the most important things in the church – it creates jealousy, isolation, division, pride and judgmentalism.

Rather, as we examine two weeks ago, spiritual gifts exist to build up the church. And that moves us back to organizing the church according to love: [1Cor. 12:18](#) But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired....[1Cor. 12:25](#) so that there may be no division in the body, but *that* the members may have the same care for one another. [1Cor. 12:26](#) And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if *one* member is honored, all the members rejoice with it. Do you see here how Paul transitions from gifts to love. Every member is important and assigned a job to do – and it is God’s job to make those assignments; your and my job is to care for one another; end of verse 31: [1Cor. 12:31](#) And I show you a still more excellent way. The path of love

2) SPECTACULARLY BEAUTIFUL RESULTS (When love is the controlling value)

“Please!” Paul says – please operate the church according to love. I am going to now read to you now chapter 13, verses 4-14, and I want you to just listen. Close your eyes and hear what is without doubt one of the most beautiful poems in the human language.

(4) Love is patient, love is kind *and* is not jealous;

love does not brag *and* is not arrogant,

(5) It does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own,

is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong *suffered*,

(6) Love does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth;

(7) Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

(8) Love never fails;

but if *there are gifts of prophecy*, they will be done away;

if *there are tongues*, they will cease;

if *there is knowledge*, it will be done away.

(9) For we know in part and we prophesy in part;

(10) but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away.

(11) When I was a child, I used to speak like a child, think like a child,

reason like a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things.

(12) For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face;

now I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known.

(13) But now faith, hope, love, abide these three; but the greatest of these is love.

Paul has been telling the church that it is time to grow up spiritually. Now we know what that means to be spiritually mature – it means to grow in love. I remember one time when I was a child, I was frustrated with my mom, because I wanted to do something and my Mom said “no.” “Why I asked? Why can’t I do this?” She said, “Craig you are not mature enough to do this.” “And I remember being provoked, and impatient, and boastful in my unbecoming response. And my mom said, “See.” My Mom knew what maturity looked like and she knew that I didn’t have it! Paul, too knows what true maturity looks like and he grieves that the Corinthians don’t have it.

And if the church is led according to love, the result is beautiful, **extremely beautiful!** What does a church look like when it is run according to love. First it is patient because; **Love is patient.** That means we wait for one another. We are not in a hurry at the expense of relationships. But we set aside our timetable for the sake of the community. A loving church is a patient church.

Second **love is kind** - a loving church is just a good place to be – kind! That means *when* we wait for one another we don't do so with gritted teeth and a bad attitude. But we are genuinely gentle and tender toward one another. A loving church is a kind church.

Third, **Love is not jealous.** Love exalts in other people's successes. Love highlights the accomplishments of others and rejoices their blessing. As a church we desire other people to succeed, even if we are not. How many of us have secretly rejoiced in another person's failure because of jealousy? There's a legend that the devil was crossing the Libyan Desert. He came across some demons that were trying to get a holy hermit to sin. They were giving it their best shot. They attacked him with the lusts of the body, and he didn't flinch. They told him he looked like a fool out there by himself in the desert, but that didn't bother him. They attacked him with doubts, but he was able to handle them. According to the legend, the devil watched all this and said, "Look. If you're dealing with a really holy person, you have to take special measures." And according to the legend, he walked up to the hermit and said, "Did you know your best friend has just been made bishop of Alexandria?" The holy man's face became twisted with jealousy. The devil had him! As hard as it is... biblical love is not jealous.

Next, **Love does not brag and is not arrogant.** Pride is such a big problem Paul repeats it twice - a church run according to love is a humble place. Arrogance is the worst problem a church can have, because *God opposes the proud*; and if God is in opposition to you,

then the game is over. But love never brags. Even in times of great victory, love is humble and gracious and others-focused.

Verse five, **1Cor. 13:5 Love does not act unbecomingly, it does not seek its own.** It does not bring shame to the body. Over and over people in Corinth bringing shame to the church as they indulged in sinful behavior, or as they indulged in their freedom. That is not walking according to love.

Next; **Love does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered.** Love is focused on others to such a radical point that when the other person offends you – we are not provoked in kind. St John Chrysostom said, “To be falsely accused and yet to remain spiritually serene is the ultimate test of faith.” (St. John Chrysostom, On Living Simply, p. 33) That is the path of love.

1Cor. 13:6 Love does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth;
1Cor. 13:7 bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. 1Cor. 13:8 Love never fails;

It is completely and utterly overwhelming to think about what a church would be like if it were run according to love. A church that rejoiced in truth, and always hoped and always believed the best about people, and always endured through difficulty. That is the institution that the Lord Jesus created to transform this love-less world. Love never fails – while many other positive characteristics of the Christian faith have a downside but love never fails to live up to its billing.

Vincent Van Gough, the great and troubled painter said, “The more I think it over, the more I feel that there is nothing more truly artistic than to love people.” Van Gough, who rejected organized religion, never knew that the ultimate art school for the art of loving one another. But so often the church falls short of this great goal, because we run the church based

on other things -- like knowledge or gifting; or money or seniority or politics. And if we remove love at the highest calling, we bring in **devastating consequences**, but if we embrace love as the controlling value in the church, we can create something **spectacularly beautiful!**

Application & Conclusion

Well how can we apply this message? I am going to guess there are two groups of people here this morning. Those who feel loved within the church, and those who do not. And I am not necessarily just talking about here at LCCC, but it could be. If you are visiting, think about your home church. Or for some they may feel loved at the local church level, but struggle in the broader church community or vice-versa.

And the reality is that we all fall into both camps. Sometimes we feel as if no one cares for us and we long for love, and at other times we might feel just the opposite. So let me encourage all of us with four suggestions for application.

1) **First** – TAKE THE INITIATIVE WITH LOVE. Our passage today has taught us how to give love. Loving always starts with you taking the initiative. Our responsibility is to extend love to other people, and then to trust God to take care of us. Very often we withhold love because we don't feel loved, and the negative cycle goes on and on; but if we take a step of obedience and show love to others, as we have learned, very often the love we are seeking will follow. When I am feeling in the depths of despair – best thing for me to do is to stop the pity-party in my mind, and to get out and help someone, to extend grace to someone. And that very often is what God uses then to remind me of His love for me and others love for me.

2) **Second** –Community Life Groups are how we at LCCC attempt to facilitate developing loving relationships in our church. In fact the theme of our CLG's this year is **Visible love**. If you feel somewhat disconnected, my first question will be whether you are

actively engaged in a small group. Several weeks before that, Tammy and I had a conflict on a CLG night because Hayden was playing in an orchestra at the Meyerson Center downtown, and we told the group we had to miss that week; but the group said, “What if we cancel the group and come support your daughter in her concert? And our CLG met at the Meyerson in support of our daughter. That is the kind of love and support that happens in our small groups. It is not just a church program, but it is where you will begin to find opportunities to live in a loving community.

Third, if you are struggling with feeling disconnected or unloved at LCCC, please come talk with me, or one of the elders. Satan’s greatest desire is to isolate us in our despair – so come on forward and let’s talk about it together.

Now, if you do feel loved this morning. If you, on this fourth anniversary Sunday rejoice in the loving community we have here at LCCC, then let me end with a final point for you.

How many have read the classic book *A Wrinkle In Time*. There are two main characters Calvin and Meg. Calvin’s and Meg come from very different families. Calvin’s family is a tough place, very little love, while Meg has a warm and loving family. And Calvin, who just has interaction with Meg’s healthy family reacts with the following dialogue.

Calvin looked at Meg, “Do you know how lucky you are?”

She smiled rather wryly. “Not most of the time.”

“A mother like that! A house like this! Gee, your mother’s gorgeous! You should see my mother. She had all her upper teeth out and Pop got her a plate but she won’t wear it, and most days she doesn’t even comb her hair. Not that it make much difference when [she does.](#)”

He clenched his fists. "But I love her. That's the funny part of it. I love them all, and they don't give a hoot about me. Maybe that's why I call when I'm not going to be home. Because I care. Nobody else does. You don't know how lucky you are to be loved."

Meg said in a startled way, "I guess I never thought of that. I guess I just took it for granted." (A Wrinkle in Time, p. 40)

When you find true love, biblical love, don't take it for granted. But praise the Lord your God for meeting your needs according to His grace, thank the people in your life, and then take that love you have received and extend it to others.