

## St. Paul: Saturday Session Fourteen: Love 4

### *Applications of Paul's Message: Love*

By popular demand, all St. Paul's quotes are in bold italic, for easy identification.

***“What no eye has ever seen, what no ear has ever heard, what no human heart has ever thought of, namely, the great blessings God holds ready for those who love him”***, 1 Cor 2:9. You know the immensity of this blessing. Paul affirms that we who love God will experience what human equipment is incapable of experiencing. Paul insists that God provides Himself, Who is beyond sensory apprehension (eye, ear), and beyond human thought. In Paul's day, because of the great emotions that accompany great thoughts, men believed that the heart was the bodily organ we employ to think. But none of our finite knowing equipment can attain infinite God. Yet God has a way to unite with us. It is infinite Love. When we love along with infinite Love, we and Love are one. God's infinity absorbs our finity. Then we become the ONE He built us to be.

Hence Paul's famous phrase: ***“Now there abide these three: faith, hope and love, but the greatest of these is love”***, 1 Cor 13:13. Faith is our guide to Love here below, and hope is our incentive, but love is the act of Love Himself. We participate in Love by loving on earth, then we unite with Love in heaven. Once we're in heaven, we are ONE in Love/Unity. So faith and hope are useless. Once we possess Love, we no longer believe or hope. It behooves us, therefore to start today what we will do forever: love Love Himself. Paul trumpets this message to the world. Paul goes up in flames of Love. That's why he was such an apostle. He let Love live in him. After persecuting Love for a few years, he yielded to Love, and allowed Love to impel and direct him.

Love becomes human in Jesus Christ. Love Himself walked among us. He taught us how to live, die, and resurrect, so that we can be with ONE by, in, and for Love. The completion of our ragged life is all ONE in Love. That's the Unity God created us to be. Greeks call this unfolding process theosis, εοσι. They mean our becoming-God. God godifies us, or makes us into infinite Love. St. Irenaeus says it clearly: God became man so that man could become God. We westerners seldom mention this, much less do we have a word for it. Instead, we emphasize love, the activity and the Person. Our way is to practice love, until Love perfects love in us.

All these words remind you of Paul's many affirmations that love is our principle project. 1 Corinthians is full of memorable ways to say that. Let's focus on how God will transform us into Love. Paul bursts forth: ***“God indeed revealed them to us through the Spirit; for the Spirit fathoms all things, including the depths of God's mind. For what human being understands human affairs except the human spirit that is in him? Thus also no one has comprehended God's affairs except the Spirit of God. Now we did not receive the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is from God, in order that we might comprehend the things freely given us by God; and we speak of them in words not instructed by human wisdom, but instructed by the Spirit, for we interpret spiritual matters by spiritual words”***, 1 Cor 2:10-13.

This Anchor Bible translation may sound strange to you, but it conveys meaning quite well. Paul says that The Spirit reveals what we know about Love. Then Paul shows the Spirit's qualifications. He reminds us that the Spirit is Perfect Understanding. Our own minds, in God's image and likeness, resemble God's. After original sin our understanding is partial and shadowy. But our spirit understands better than other men. Paul says that Jesus left us His Spirit, Who is one with the Father, just as the Son is One. Accepting this dynamic makes us ONE by Love. Individually, we and the Trinity are ONE. Our little human person becomes ONE with the Three Persons. All four of us are ONE. That's what Love does. It unites into ONE. Expanding to the community, as each person is ONE with the Persons, so all of us are ONE together. This Unity is Divine.

Paul knows that the Corinthians do not understand this. They do not know, step by step, how this process unfolds. But the Spirit takes them to Love. As Fr. Spicq expresses it: “In contrast to the ‘world's rulers’ of verse 8, who did not recognize God's wisdom in Christ, ‘those who love God’ adhere to Jesus, and recognize him as Lord of glory. The first light given, therefore, illuminates the Son of God crucified, and those who are faithful to

him because they love God, receive, besides, an eschatological knowledge about the future life. St. Paul speaks of this knowledge again in 1 Cor 13:12. None but the ‘charitable’ are enlightened by the Spirit.

“Those who love God’ have the privilege of being initiated into the mystery of their salvation, of the happiness that will crown it, and of the means of attaining it. Their knowledge, revealed by the Spirit, is not the result of keen intellectual insight, but rather of *agape*, which makes the faithful more ‘spiritual’, able to grasp the meaning of a spiritual secret, and the value of a spiritual joy. It must be pointed out here that the ‘beatitude’ of the ‘mature’ (v 6), of ‘those who are ripe for it’, is intrinsically linked to the ‘passion’ of the Son. St. John later discovered the charity of the Father in this mysterious relationship”, 25-26; *Agape in the New Testament*.

It’s all very clear to Paul that Love is mysterious because Love transcends our experience. But God infuses Love into us. First the Father infuses Love by creating us. Then the Son infuses Love by teaching and redeeming us. Then the Spirit infuses Love by perfecting the Son’s work. This perfecting includes comfort in our trials, and encouragement along the hard way of Love, the way of the cross. But most importantly, the Spirit shares with us God’s secrets. Here, Paul affirms that the Spirit interprets God’s gifts to us. Chief among these gifts is God Himself: Love. This massive gift defies complete explanation, but Paul gets part of it across to us.

**“Mere knowledge breeds conceit; it is love that builds. If anyone thinks he knows something, he does not yet know how to know. But if a man loves God, he is known by him”**, 1 Cor 8:1b-3. Paul emphasizes how human knowledge puffs man up to claim knowledge about divine things, like God’s love. People misinterpret Paul, because he speaks from God’s love, but they do not listen from God’s love. These people imitate Paul’s words, but **not** his deeds. However, only deeds show Love. Paul calls the Corinthians to love by showing how love improves knowledge. Paul insists that love is knowledge, just as, in God, Love=Knowledge. When man loves God, God knows man by mutual love. Then knowledge radiates out so that the loving man knows God. This is the necessary process, naturally, since God is Love. Love overcomes divisions, making all one. Paul constantly reaffirms this love-dynamic. It is the mark of truth. Only if man loves God does man know God. If man loves God, then man overflows with Love of his fellow men. Paul is a living example of this love, serving his beloved in spite of trials, tribulations, and attacks. Love-in-act exhibits Love. It’s not theory; it’s act.

The specific act Paul deals with here is bolstering weak faith. Some Corinthians worried that meat sacrificed to idols, then sold in public, was somehow spiritually contaminated. Their faith was weak, divided by superstition, as if idols had power. Other Corinthians realized that idols are figments of someone’s imagination. So there are no “gods” who could curse the meat. They understood that eating this meat was no problem at all. A few of these learned people despised their weak brothers. They challenged them to abandon their superstitions. This is not half bad. But what would love do instead? Paul asserts that love would refrain from eating meat sacrificed to idols, for their weak brothers’ sake. That’s 1 Cor 8:1a: **“Now concerning meats offered to idols.”**

We admit that Paul’s thoughts run ahead of his language. The result is linguistically ambiguous, as Fr. Spicq points out on p 27. Manuscript, P<sup>46</sup> is clearer: **“If anyone thinks he has knowledge, he does not yet know how to know; but if anyone loves, he is the man who possesses knowledge.”** (1 Cor 8:2-3) As Fr. Spicq wisely says: “St. Paul is trying to show that true religious knowledge seeks the good of the other person, not its own interest”, 27. See 1 Cor 10:24, 33; 13:5. Fr Spicq reminds us that we must read each passage in light of all the others. This context enables us to grasp Paul’s meaning. Considering all that Paul says, we notice that he often integrates love and knowledge. True knowledge flows from true love, from Love Himself. All three Persons are Love, and They love us in ways that overflow all descriptions. Knowing and loving are One in our Source. As we accept our Source, knowing and loving unite in us. This Unity is God’s Gift. To Paul, this is obvious, because he lives Love. Jesus showed him how to do this. Christ’s Spirit is Love, living in Paul. The Father started this love-dynamic. Paul affirms that all Three live in the man who accepts Christ.

Living this Love, Paul sees some Corinthians complacent in human knowledge that sacrificed meats aren’t contaminated. They fall short of divine knowledge precisely by despising their brother who doesn’t know that. What’s Paul’s basic reason for seeing this? Divine knowledge is Love. It’s the identity of Pure Being:

Knowledge=Love. Because Paul lives this Unity, he sees all these connections clearly and immediately. Trying to express these connections is so huge a problem that Paul frequently stumbles in his attempt. So we look beyond each stumble, survey the entire epistle, and learn more about his meaning. By surveying all his epistles, we get even more. By adding what Acts tells us, we get the entire picture passed down from the first century.

Then we pray Paul's message. By reading his epistles prayerfully, we open ourselves to his profound interaction with Love. That interaction is Love Himself, manifest in Jesus. But Jesus reveals both the Father and the Spirit, so Jesus Unifies us. No longer treating us as servants, Jesus treats us as members of His family, John 15:15. All family members know the inner secret of Love. Love is Trinity, is One. By accepting Love, we enter this Divine Dynamic. This Dynamic urges us on, as Paul points out in 2 Cor 9:7: "***Let each one give as he has determined in his heart, not grudgingly, or from compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.***" In the context Paul shared with us, it's clear that love makes us cheerful, even when we give away scanty resources. All is ONE in Love for Paul, because he gives himself totally to Jesus Who gave Himself totally to Paul. By His incarnation, life, death and resurrection, Jesus gave Himself totally to all of us. May we respond totally.