

February 1, 2004  
Epiphany 4

*“Love Is a Verb in the Body of Christ”*

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**1 CORINTHIANS 12:27-13:31**

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**N**ow you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. <sup>28</sup> And in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues. <sup>29</sup> Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? <sup>30</sup> Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? <sup>31</sup> But eagerly desire the greater gifts. And now I will show you the most excellent way. <sup>13:1</sup> If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. <sup>2</sup> 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 have not love, I am nothing. <sup>3</sup> If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing. <sup>4</sup> Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. <sup>5</sup> It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. <sup>6</sup> Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. <sup>7</sup> It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. <sup>8</sup> Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. <sup>9</sup> For we know in part and we prophesy in part, <sup>10</sup> but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears. <sup>11</sup> When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me. <sup>12</sup> Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. <sup>13</sup> And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

The agnostic German philosopher Fredrick Nietzsche once made this stinging indictment of Christians when he said, “I will consider learning more about your Redeemer when the church starts acting a little more redeemed.” You may have talked with people who have said they do not want to come to worship because the church is filled with nothing but hypocrites.

Every believer in the body of Christ knows that is hard to practice what you preach especially when it comes to loving people. To be honest I never used to like these words just read to you from 1 Corinthians 13 such as “Love is patient...Love is kind.” I knew that was not me, because my love whether it was for my mom and dad or brothers and sister never measured up to these words. And when I got married I became even more aware of my many shortcomings. What a joy it was to be able to see that this word “Love” was not just a noun stating what I should be like but a verb. The love that Jesus has for you is such a powerful verb, an act of kindness, a dynamic so great, that it begins to change your life and lead you to be more patient and more kind.” This morning I want to speak to you about love, not romantic love, not brotherly love, but this unique agape or sacrificial love that fills your life because of Jesus. Let’s hear how **“Love Is a Verb in the Body of Christ.”**

## **1) Look at who you are**

First, I want you to take a good look at who you are, not who you are by yourself, but who you are in Christ. "Now you are the body of Christ, and each of you is a part of it." Reality shows are the current rage on television. I have heard about one show called, "The Extreme Makeover" where ordinarily plain looking people are turned into beautiful people. You were born into this world a dead corpse. You were made alive. Jesus became your Head. You are now his body. Everything that Jesus did, the perfect life he lived for you, the perfect sacrifice he made for your sin, and even his resurrection from the dead is all yours. You are the body of Christ and Jesus is your head.

The body of Christ is so beautiful because it is made up of many different parts and each part has an important function. Listen to what some of the parts do. "And in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those have gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different tongues." The Lord raised up people in his church to serve the church in different ways. In the early church the apostles gave us the Scriptures. Some were given the gifts of healing, or speaking in tongues, or even working miracles. In these last days the Lord raises up people to teach his word, and serve with a variety of different gifts such as proclaiming God's word boldly, serving, teaching, encouraging, giving generously, and leading others. 1 Corinthians 12:18 says, "But in fact God has arranged the parts of in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be." Each of you has been made a part of the body of Christ, and each of us been gifted by the Lord in some way to serve other members of the body.

Let me tell a little story to illustrate how important it is for the body to function together. When we lived in Tucson, we often visited a place called Sabino Canyon. One day as we started on a hike, my oldest son, about ten, was ahead of me. I heard the angry rattling sound of the rattlesnake, saw it coiled in the path, and in a flash saw my son jump backward as if he had legs like a frog. Think of all the different parts of the body that had to function together in a split second to avoid being seriously bitten by that large snake that slithered off the trail. The ears heard the sound, the eyes saw the snake, the brain said jump, the muscles tensed, the body moved, the child was safe out of harms way. If his legs said, "I don't feel like jumping now because I am tired from playing soccer yesterday," he would have been seriously injured.

You are the body of Christ, working together, helping each other, protecting each other, and encouraging each other. When the time comes to jump and help, then we need to jump. No matter how serious and urgent the cry that comes from the body of Christ for help, it must always be done in love. That's why Paul writes, "And now let me show you the most excellent way."

## **2) Look at who you are filled with God's love**

Paul warns against functioning without love. "If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels and have not love, I am only a resounding gong and clanging cymbal." If you were the greatest preacher in the world and could hold people spellbound with your words and

did not have love, then you are nothing but a clanging cymbal making lots of noise. If you have the gift of prophecy to proclaim God's Word boldly and the gift of knowledge to dig deep into the Scriptures to give the right answers, but do not have love, you are nothing. If your faith is so strong that you could move mountains and do not have love, you are nothing. Give all your money to the poor, or surrender your life to the flames without love, and you gain nothing without love. Whatever you do for Christ in your family, in your church, in your community, if it is not done in love, it means nothing.

A few years ago there was a popular little movie called "Pay It Forward." It was about a boy named Trevor who came home from a social studies class determined to do kind things for people with the hope that instead of paying him back, they would "pay it forward" or pass on the love to others. As nice as that movie was, it was not realistic. Our sinful human nature always wants some pay back or some recognition for showing love. Our love is never pure by itself. Pagan philosophers like Albert Camus and Ayn Rand have said, "There is no love but self love." That is why Scripture says, "All our righteous deeds are like filthy rags."

Here is the good news. The love of Jesus is so pure it cleans our feeble attempts to love and makes them acceptable to our God. "The blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin." It even wipes clean the selfishness that attaches itself to our deeds of kindness and love. That's why on judgment day we will stand before God, and hear the words, "Come you who are blessed by my Father." Then we will even see deeds kindness and love we never knew we did, all purified by the blood of the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

The love that Jesus has for you is not just a noun. It is a verb. Romans 5 says "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: while we were sinners Christ died for us." The Greek word for love is agape, which has the thought of doing something for someone outside of your self, sacrificing yourself. This love of Jesus changes our lives dramatically and gives us power to love.

Listen now to the change that Jesus love can bring about in your life. "Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, 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." Let me ask you a personal question: "Is this you?" Are you patient? (when the check out clerk takes forever) Are you kind? Did you know that after WW1 Herbert Hoover became famous in Europe for heading up a relief program that helped people after the war? The people in Finland developed a verb for this kind of love and kindness. They spoke of being "Hoovered." Wouldn't it be something if my acts of kindness would be so well known in this community that people would be saying, "I have been 'Degnered.'"

Are ready for more personal questions? Ouch! Do you envy when you see someone more successful than you? Do you hope people ask about you so you can boast about what's happening in your life instead of listening to them? Are you proud, or rude or constantly looking to draw attention to yourself? More personal questions, more pain. Are you easily angered, short fused? Do you keep a record of wrongs, like the old fellow who complained to the family counselor about his wife being historical. The counselor said with a smile, "You mean hysterical." "No," I mean "Historical," she never forgets a thing I did wrong.

The list goes on, and on, beating us down further. Love does not delight in evil. People love to pass on bad news about other because it makes them feel good. Are we any better when we enjoy hearing something bad about someone we don't like? And how about some salt in the wounds. "Love always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Always, always, always! I am ready to walk out the door. This excursion into the land of love makes me feel worthless, empty, hardly a joyful member of the body of Christ.

Then I realize that love is a verb, not just something the Lord wants me to do but a love that Jesus has for me, that so fills my life, it begins to change me from within and start me on a path that makes me eager to work at being more kind, more patient, less self seeking, more protecting and more trusting. Just as the battery puts power to this light in this flashlight, Jesus' love for you puts power into your ability to love.

Perhaps this story of human love will help us see how Jesus changes us within. Tony Campolo tells the story of a fifth grade teacher, a Christian, named Miss Thompson. She prided herself in treating all her students equal. One year her ability to love and show kindness was severely challenged by a boy named Teddy. Teddy was often untidy, smelly, listless, glassy-eyed and not liked by the other kids. She found herself not liking Teddy and that was not fair considering the records she had seen. 1<sup>st</sup> grade: Shows promise, poor home life. 2<sup>nd</sup> grade: Could do better. Mother very ill. 3<sup>rd</sup> grade: Good boy. Too serious. Mother died. 4<sup>th</sup> grade: Slow, well behaved. Father shows no interest.

Christmas came and the kids brought the presents to their teacher. Teddy's was wrapped in brown paper with too much scotch tape. She opened it and out fell a bracelet with some rhinestones missing and a bottle of cheap perfume, half opened. The class laughed. The teacher put on the bracelet, held it too the light and show how it sparkled. She put on the perfume and told the class she liked its smell. After everyone left, Teddy stood around, and finally had enough nerve to tell Miss Thompson, "You smell like my mom and her bracelet looks good on you too." When Teddy left the room, she broke down and cried, vowing to show more love to Teddy. Teddy improved.

Miss Thompson received letters from Teddy, second in the class in high school. From the university, he wrote he was first in his class. Four years later, an invitation came to the wedding- from Teddy Stallard, M.D., asking her to sit where his mother would have sat if she were alive.

If human love can change people and make them more loving, how much greater is the love of Christ, powerful, dynamic, life changing. **Love is a verb in the body of Christ.** Amen.