

## Build on the Power of Christ-like Love

- ✠ Blessing the church (12:27-31)
- ✠ Treasuring relationships (13:1-7)
- ✠ Pressing on to eternity (13:8-13)

In the name of Jesus, our shining Epiphany Light, dear mirrors of God's grace in Christ:

In a far off region of China, a young pastor was very frustrated. A pair of traveling evangelists had shown up at church expecting to preach and teach. Extra helpers seemed like a good idea, so the pastor put them to work with the Word. But soon things started to unravel. Problems began to surface when the two kept asking the poor congregation for money. Before long the unknown Christians were teaching the congregation what they called, "speaking in tongues." Like Pentecostals everywhere they insisted that "real Christians" had these "charismatic gifts," which somehow they thought they could teach instead of just receiving them as gifts from God. More than half the members left the congregation. The youthful pastor did not know what went wrong or what he should have done differently.

Christian pastors have always faced challenges like this. The Lord's Apostle Paul warned the elders from Ephesus: *"I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them."* (Acts 20:29f NIV) Pastors need a thorough knowledge of God's Word to protect themselves and the Savior's sheep and lambs in their care. And God's people need to hear God's Word in order to distinguish between truth and error. That's how we **Build on the Power of Christ-like Love...**

### ✠ Blessing the church (12:27-31)

Left to ourselves, we sinners always get things backwards. In fact, the harder we try to do what is right the more damage we inflict. We're like a big brown bear breaking into somebody's kitchen. Those clanging pots and pans won't produce anything good to eat. It only means your food is getting splattered all over the walls and floor while the big claws and clumsy paws of "Breaker Bear One" destroy everything in sight. The more excited bears and people like that get, the more trouble they cause.

You may not be surprised to hear they had similar problems in the ancient church town of Corinth. Certain individuals considered themselves smarter and more gifted than anyone else. They thought everyone should listen to them – and certainly not to that little man named Paul who came on his missionary journeys. What they really did not like about Paul was that he claimed to speak for Jesus Christ Himself. And while they bragged about speaking in tongues, Paul could speak more languages than all of them put together. So his way of ranking gifts must have really irritated them.

*"Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it."* They thought they were all of it, not just a part of Christ's body, the church. *"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."* Did you hear that? Speaking in other languages is last! But Paul isn't finished humbling them: *"Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? But eagerly desire the greater gifts."* You can almost hear them demanding, "What would those 'greater gifts' be, Paul?" The Lord's Apostle blesses us: *"And now I will show you the most excellent way."* All of us Christians need a lesson in how to **Build on the Power of Christ-like Love** instead of insisting on our own way, our own opinions, our own desires, needs and wants. Repent of every sin of selfishness and learn to be **Blessing the church.**

## **Treasuring relationships (13:1-7)**

One of the things I love about this is that the blessings carry over to your family and all your relationships. Pastor Joe Johnson wrote in a recent email, “X-men, Baseball, Romance and the Meaning of Life...Does a need for belonging and the sense of individuality give us a clue to ultimate reality? What do you need to have a life that satisfies? Can the desire to belong to something bigger than yourself and the need for uniqueness really be met in life? [How can we satisfy these] deep longings of the human heart”?

When we **Build on the Power of Christ-like Love**, we truly begin **Treasuring relationships**. Spiritual gifts and high powered talents cannot make you happy. Nor can they help you be loved by people around you. The Holy Spirit through Paul really hammers down our pride with this: ***“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.”*** Without love, any kind of tongue-speaking means no more than wind chimes blowing around by someone’s door, or coins jingling in your pocket. ***“If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge”*** – preaching sermons and teaching Bible classes better than anyone else – ***“and if I have a faith that can move mountains”*** – which would really be exciting to watch! – ***“but have not love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames”*** – like the most devout Christian martyrs ever – ***“but have not love, I gain nothing.”***

This is not “love” American style, or what Hollywood movies try to pass off as “love.” **Christ-like Love “is patient....”** You can tell because Christ has been so very, very patient with us day after day, year after year. **Christ-like Love “is kind”** because it does not just feel sorry for people who are poor and needy. Kindly **Christ-like Love** always finds a way to help others instead of asking others to help you. ***“It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud.”*** And wherever you see these sins in your life, confess them and ask Jesus to help you be like Him. **Christ-like Love “is not rude....”** And that’s a real lesson for every Christian home because we really need to learn to be polite with each other and ***“not self-seeking....”*** **Christ-like Love “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.”** It ***“bears all things....”*** (KJV) Like a good roof on your house protecting you from rain and snow, those who **Build on the Power of Christ-like Love** cover over sin and honor each other’s secrets. We are **Treasuring relationships** because we love the Lord who loved us first and gave Himself for us.

## **Pressing on to eternity (13:8-13)**

When you **Build on the Power of Christ-like Love**, you never give up under trial or turn away from the one Way that leads to life with God in heaven. **Christ-like Love** keeps you **Pressing on to eternity**. Sometimes we feel as if we can’t go on because we forget that God has promised these days of sadness and heartache on earth will finally and suddenly come to an end. All the preaching and tongue-speaking – good and bad, even knowledge itself ***“will pass away.”*** What we have here on earth in our heads and hearts and universities just clutters our lives like cargo from an old freight train. The more you know, the less you know, and the more you realize how much you need to learn. All of what we experience here on earth is like child’s play compared to life with God in heaven. We don’t know exactly what it will be like. But the best of earth is like kids’ toys compared to the wonders of heaven.

***“Now we see but a poor reflection”*** like looking in a mirror made of dented metal. But ***“then we shall see face to face,”*** not at all afraid to look at the just and holy God whose merciful kindness washed away the guilt of our sins with the blood of His own Son. ***“Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known”*** – Jesus’ delightful love for me and all the believers who trusted Jesus from Adam and Eve, Abraham and Sarah, Mary and Joseph, and everyone in between. Do you see how great this is? ***“Now these three remain: faith, hope and love.”*** In heaven we will enjoy perfect trust without any fear. The eager expectation of joy will bring a new discovery of wonderful surprises from God around every corner. ***“But the greatest of these is love”*** because **Christ-like Love** is the foundation and the power and the wonder of paradise. God’s Word of **Love** keeps us **Pressing on to eternity**. Amen.