

“SACRIFICIAL LOVE”

Holiness

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I Corinthians 13

October 3, 2014

Don: Let us pray. Father in heaven, we thank You and praise You that You are our God, and through Jesus Christ, we are Your people. We thank You for this wonderful day that You have made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it. Our Father, we pray that, as Bruce prays every week, that You would help us to behold wonderful things from Your word, for Christ’s sake, for we pray in His name. Amen.

Men: Amen.

Don: All right. Bruce asked me to speak on sacrificial love, and I can’t think of a more appropriate passage than 1 Corinthians 13, which is read at a lot of weddings. That always amuses me somewhat. There’s nothing wrong with reading it at weddings, but it is read even at non-Christian weddings, because people think it’s really sentimental. But it’s anything but sentimental, as we will see, as we read this passage. So let’s read from the book of 1 Corinthians, chapter 13, and I’m reading from the New King James Version.

“Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass, or a clanging cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith so I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing. Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy. Love does not parade itself, is not puffed up, does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails. But whether there are prophecies, they will fail; whether there are tongues, they will cease; whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away. When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child. But when I became a man, I put away childish things. And now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know, just as I also am known. And now abide faith, hope, love, these three, but the greatest of these is love.” This is the word of the LORD.

Men: Thanks be to God!

Don: A lot to cover here. As I said before, people read these passages at weddings, and they forget the original context, love in the body of Christ. In light of what Bruce said last week, loving one another from the heart in 1 Peter chapter 1, this is *agape*. This is not *eros*, which our culture is infected with, and not just *phileo*, either, brotherly love. We’re to have that, but we’re also to have *agape*, a self-sacrificial love.

And Christianity, really, is the only religion, if you want to put it that way, which displays and demonstrates the love of God. You know, in the Old Testament, of course,

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we know that the Bible says that we're to love God, and to love our neighbor as ourselves. But it's only Christ who said that we are to love each other as He has loved us. And, of course, He demonstrated that in the superior way of going to the cross for our sins. You certainly don't find it in Islam, that's for sure—not just so-called radical Islam, either, but Islam in general. The false god, Allah, is aloof, distant. It would horrify a Muslim to be told that he can have an intimate relationship with God as his Father. He would consider that blasphemy. God's relation to the Muslim is servant to master, not Father to son. And, of course, we don't find that in Hinduism or Buddhism either. Only Christianity really demonstrates the love of God.

Now I want to share some shocking passages before we go to our text. 1 John 4:7. “Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God, and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.” Do you realize what John is saying there? He's saying that only Christians really have the capacity to love. Now, if you want to make someone mad, just say that to him. But this is what the Bible says.

We know that there are people who have cheerful, pleasant personalities—Non-Christians, who put many of us to shame in that regard. However, they don't love, as Christ says that we're to love. Titus 3:3 says that “we ourselves were also foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another.” But God, through His grace, has saved us, and delivered us from that, and we can praise His name.

So let's talk about this chapter. We have the necessity of love, the characteristics of love, and the superiority of love.

First, the necessity of love. All right, now don't forget the setting here, the context. The Corinthians, to whom Paul was writing, in addition to all of their other problems and sins, like divisions, immorality, the wrong use of the Lord's Supper, the denial of the Resurrection, also boasted about their spiritual gifts, and compared themselves to one another, something Bruce said last week that we're not supposed to do, especially the showy gifts, like tongues, and knowledge, and healing.

And Paul, in effect, says, “Look!” You can have and exhibit all of these things, but if you don't have love, it's a big, fat zero! I can have the tongues of men, the apostolic ability to speak languages without learning them. And, hypothetically, even if we were to speak the language of angels, without love, it's nothing, all right?

The same with knowledge, prophecy and faith, something that we teachers, and lovers of the word of God and theology have to take very, very seriously. Like Bruce says all the time, learning isn't enough. Learning must lead to living, and living must lead to loving.

And here's the real shocker. I can give my goods to the poor. I can give my body to be burned, presumably in martyrdom, and without love, it's nothing. We think of Ted Turner, an outspoken critic and enemy of Christianity, who gave millions of dollars to the United Nations. Also, I understand that Bill Gates has given away many millions of dollars. I don't know where he's at spiritually, but I've heard that he is also very generous. And we think, of course, of the suicide bombers, who believe really, actually

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and sincerely that they are doing the will of God by having themselves killed and killing others because they think that they are going to go to heaven.

But, you know, before we cluck our tongues and say, “Oh boy, those people! Well, you know, I’m not like that!” but think about it. How many of us, when we’re evangelizing, do it out of love for God, and love for the Lord Jesus Christ? Or do we do it with this attitude: “Boy, I’m going to show that abortion-minded woman, or that homosexual, or that atheist! I’m going to show them the truth!” No, no! Let’s do it out of love for Christ, and for the people who we want to see saved. Otherwise, it’s nothing.

Okay, now. Number two, the characteristics of love, a whole lot of them. And it’s interesting to me that, in verses 4-7 here, we don’t have anything about feelings, do we? So much of our culture today believes that love is a feeling. But we have none of that here. It’s all descriptions of what it is. And what it isn’t. Feelings are nice; don’t get me wrong. But that doesn’t enter into this here. You know, it’s not just natural affection, brotherly love, which we are to have in the body of Christ, which the world has. But it goes beyond that, as Bruce said last week. It’s supernatural, it’s sacrificial love. Tom, if I may pick on you, you’re going to Croatia, to people who you’ve never seen before. Maybe some of them you have, but a lot of them you haven’t. They wonder, “What are you doing here?” Well, you’re there because you love the people, and you want to see them saved, and you want to help pastors to equip people for ministry. So that’s very important.

“Love suffers long and is kind.” I like the term “suffers long” rather than “patient.” You know, we use “patient” so casually, just like the word “persecution.” If someone picks on me, I’m being persecuted. No, no, that’s not persecution, not the way the world is experiencing it. It’s the same way with “patience.” When something on my computer doesn’t work, I get impatient. We get impatient when something on the car doesn’t work right. I get impatient waiting for Sig’s emails. (Guffaw.) Just kidding, just kidding!

Sig: I heard that.

Don: I know, I know! (*Laughter.*) I intended you to! No, no, just kidding! But, you know, we get impatient. But this is long-suffering. This is the long haul, day in and day out, bearing with a person.

And our Savior, of course, is the supreme example of all of these characteristics. He was patient with the disciples. How many times didn’t they get it? They didn’t get it time after time.

“Do you understand these things?” Jesus said.

“Yes, Lord.” And then, a few chapters later, “Explain the parable to us.”

Or “Do you understand this?”

“Yes, Lord.”

“I’m going to be delivered to the Jews to be crucified.”

“Lord, this shall never happen to You!”

They constantly don’t get it. And even after His resurrection, a lot of them didn’t get it, and some of them doubted. But our Savior was patient, long-suffering.

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Monica, Augustine’s mother, prayed for twenty years for her son to come to Christ. Parents, you who have strong-willed children or teenagers, who are going through so many things, you’re to be patient and long-suffering.

Now in the body of Christ, some people are just naturally easy to love, and get along with, right? And there’s nothing wrong with that. Even Jesus had His circle of friends—Mary and Martha and Lazarus, and the Twelve, and the three—Peter, James and John among the Twelve, and John among the three. But we’re to suffer long with brothers and sisters who we find it very difficult sometimes to get along with. Apply it where it needs to be applied in your life.

“And is kind.” All right, we can pretty much identify with what that means. The word is “compassionate.” It means “to come alongside.”

How many times is it said of our Savior that “He was moved with compassion for the crowds?” Different translations say that “they were harassed and helpless,” or “weary and scattered,” or “wounded and weary, like sheep without a shepherd.” He had compassion.

The root of that is very interesting. In the Old King James, if you read, I believe it’s in Song of Solomon, where the wife supposedly is talking about her husband, and it says this, “My bowels were moved for him.” Now, he didn’t mean what we mean by it. (*Laughter.*) Compassion was said to occur in the intestines. We say “in the heart.”

But “His heart went out,” it says in Luke, to the widow who had lost both her husband and her only son. He was “deeply moved” at the tomb of Lazarus, though He would raise him from the dead. Of course, the supreme example of Christ’s kindness is on the cross, isn’t it? His first saying was “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do,” not “Lord, give them what they deserve.” No, no. “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” And we know that, in the case of the elect, who later would come to Him, this prayer was answered. And, of course, there are many, many ways to show kindness in the body of Christ, and outside as well. I see it here, exemplified in many, many ways.

All right, now we come to what love does not do. “Love does not envy.” Now, it’s understandable—it’s wrong, but it’s understandable, in light of our weakness and in light of our sinfulness—if we’re not always patient and kind with people, particularly people that get our goat. But envy is another thing altogether. Envy is much worse. Envy is unhappiness at the good providences and circumstances of someone else. And none of us are immune to it. In fact, one of you knows that I confessed it to you in my own life last week with a situation that I was thinking about.

We see examples in the bible. Saul, in the Old Testament with David. “Saul has slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands.” Saul just got very, very, very jealous, and you see ten chapters or more in the book of 1 Samuel, where Saul’s main ambition in life was to kill David. We have Ahab with Naiboth’s vineyard. (*Paraphrase*): “I want that vineyard! I’m going to get it, and I’ll kill you if I have to.” And, of course, Jezebel does that very thing.

And we think, “Oh, we could never suffer that.” But what about the apostles, on the night before Christ’s crucifixion, when they should have been thinking about the agony

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their Savior was going to go through for their sakes. But what do they do? In Luke’s Gospel, they dispute about who would be the greatest, implying that “I should be.”

“No, you shouldn’t! I should,” or whatever.

Let me ask you this. In teaching you, I teach myself. How do you react when you feel slighted—when someone else gets that promotion, that award, that recognition that you think you deserve, and maybe you do deserve it? I’ve talked to some people who have seen this kind of envy even among church leadership—sessions, etc. It’s a very devastating thing. Christian love is not like that; it’s to be the opposite. Let us not let envy, as it says in Galatians 5, devour us.

Love does not parade itself. It’s not puffed up. The old King James says, “it vaunteth not itself.” How many times did Jesus have to condemn the Pharisees for this very thing—parading their righteousness before men, to be seen by them, praying on the street corners, doing their good works to impress people?

But, you know what, it can be very subtle in our lives, can’t it, even if we think it to ourselves. O Lord, look what I’m doing! Lord, look at the time I’m spending in Your word, in prayer, active in Christian work, that kind of thing. That other person, well he hardly does anything!

Rob Pratt on KDKA a couple weeks ago was talking about someone who had passed away recently, and he called him “a Pittsburgh icon.” Well, what was his claim to fame? In Rob’s words, “he kicked butt.” (Other words were used.) But he paraded himself. He laced himself with obscenities, a heavy drinker, that kind of thing.

Now, you know, Christ does say that people are to see our good works, that they may glorify our Father in heaven, but what’s the motive there? It’s that they may see our good works, and glorify God, not us, not to bring attention to ourselves. That’s a big difference.

It’s interesting to me, that on the day of judgment, when Jesus talks about the evidence of salvation, where He says to the sheep, “Come, blessed of My Father; inherit the kingdom for you prepared from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry, and you gave Me to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me to drink,” etc. And what is the reaction of the sheep? Is it “Yes, Lord, and look at this, and this, and this?” No, it’s the very opposite. “Lord, when did we see You hungry, thirsty, naked, etc.?” You know, they’re not even going to be aware of that kind of thing. So it’s important that we examine ourselves in that area.

There are several passages in the Old and New Testaments, in the epistles and the Gospels, that say that we’re to be clothed with humility, “humble and gentle,” “meek,”—not weak; not wimps; strength under control—but “God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.” Pride, of course, is the root of all sin, isn’t it? In C. S. Lewis’s words, it’s “what made the devil become the devil.”

Love does not behave rudely. The old King James says “unseemly.” Now we all know people like that, right? Boorish, obscene in their language, noisy, sarcastic, interrupting—

Sig: Sounds like me. (*Laughter.*)

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Don: If the shoe fits,— (*Laughter.*) Constantly always wanting to have the last word, that kind of thing. This is not Christian love.

Love does not seek its own. Its own what? Its own reputation, its own status, its own praise. It always has the interests of God and others in mind. You know, there’s a little acronym called joy—Jesus, others, you. As Bruce said last week, the Christian life consists of self-denial, self-sacrifice, and self-submission—hard stuff, impossible for us apart from the work of God in our lives, which is constant, and every day.

Now what about self-love, which is touted today? Somebody brought that up last week. You know, we naturally love ourselves, don’t we? Even the person who says that he doesn’t, or manifests signs of masochism, really deep down does love himself. And the Bible does not say that we’re to love our neighbor and hate ourselves, but “love your neighbor as yourself,” as you already love yourself.

It’s interesting to me that the Westminster Larger Catechism comments on the Ten Commandments, and several times it mentions ourselves and others in them. For example, for “Thou shalt not steal” it says that we’re to protect the wealth and possessions and material goods of ourselves and others. Or, in “thou shalt not bear false witness” we’re to protect the good name and reputation of ourselves and others. Obviously, you have to be able to look out for yourself in the sense of providing for yourself financially, or whatever, in order to care for others.

But it’s selfishness that is condemned here. Love doesn’t look out for its own. It’s not concerned only about its own interests. We’re to “give honor and preference to one another.” Romans 12, verse 10. We’re to “esteem others better than ourselves,” and to “look out not only for our own interests, but those of others.” Philippians 4:3-4. That kind of puts the kaibosh on self esteem, doesn’t it? That’s something that is touted so much in our culture today.

How many times in the Gospels, when Jesus withdrew to pray alone did crowds throng? Or, when He wanted to go away with His disciples to rest for a while, what happens? No sooner do they do it then crowds throng them, and He never turned them away.

Someone I prayed with last week, who wants to remain anonymous, but when she and I prayed, it was amazing! Her prayer blew me away! There was not one word about herself, only about her husband, and her kids and family. There are myriad applications in the body of Christ to this aspect of love.

“Love is not provoked; it thinks no evil.” Some translations say that it “keeps no record of wrongs.” How about that, huh? Do you know people who are easily provoked—angry a lot of the time, cynical? It’s easy to be that way when you’re hanging around people like that.

Christian love is the opposite. It thinks the best of people. It looks for the best in a person. How many marriages, family relationships, close friendships in the body of Christ have been ruined because of holding grudges, because of keeping a record of wrongs? What does Paul say in Colossians 3, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit? “Forgive, as the Lord forgave you.” And Bruce said last week that if we have a hard time doing that, we need to go back and remember what Christ has done for us, who have

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done nothing but sin. The only thing we contribute to our salvation is our sin. We’ve spit in His face. We still continue to do that, even as believers, and yet He forgives all of our sins, and we need to have that kind of attitude for someone else, hard as it may be.

King David refused to curse Shimei, who was cursing him. Even when he had the opportunity to kill Saul, who was pursuing him and trying to kill him, didn’t do it. And he even, unbelievably, spoke well of him at Saul’s death. I think that, in my natural frame of mind anyway, I would have said, “Oh Lord, thank you! At last, he’s gone. You’ve vindicated me!” No, David didn’t do that. That’s the kind of love that does not keep a record of wrongs.

It “does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices with the truth.” “Oh, he deserves what’s coming to him!” I remember Watergate, and all the statements about President Nixon at the time, and all the names that were called. Or how about the Clinton/Lewinsky scandal? People just ate that kind of stuff up. Or the O. J. trial, the daily soap opera that was. How many people gossip under the guise of “Well, we need to pray for that person,” when, all the time, it’s really rejoicing in iniquity.

I remember when Osama bin Laden was killed, and I thought he should have been. But the reaction of many people was rejoicing and whooping and hollering. No, we’re not to rejoice at the downfall of a brother in Christ, or anyone, for that matter. We want to restore or reclaim that brother through church discipline.

“Love does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices with the truth,” in seeing the restoration of a brother, or the salvation of an individual.

Now do we pray for justice? Yes, we do. That is perfectly legitimate, but in God’s way, and in God’s time, not in a vengeful manner, and certainly not rejoicing in iniquity.

“Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.” Not that we’re to be undiscerning, or naïve, just believing anything that comes down the pike; of course not! But we’re to trust, we’re to bear with one another. We’re to be there for someone, day in and day out, no matter how many times that person disappoints us, or doesn’t meet our expectations, to be there through thick and thin. That is sacrificial love. As Bruce says, I can’t tell you how to do that. I don’t know the situations of all of your lives. All I know is that this is what we’re called to in the body of Christ—to be willing, if necessary, to suffer grief, to give our lives for the brethren. What did Christ say? “Greater love has no man than this: that one lay down his life for his friends.” Not that we literally do that, a lot of times, but to be there, as Bruce said last week, to make someone else the wheel around which our lives revolve. These are the characteristics and qualities of love.

So far, we’ve seen the necessity of love, the characteristics of love, and last, but certainly not least, the superiority of love, in verses 8-13. “Love never fails.” Other translations say, “Love never ends.”

Did you ever think about that? It’s eternal. The one thing that is going to go on and on in the body of Christ forever is the Energizer bunny, right? It keeps going and going. Forgive me for using such a trite example for this great truth. But “love never ends,” or “fails.”

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The gifts that the Corinthians were so excited about, and that some Christians today think are so wonderful, will cease. Now there is debate there. Is Paul talking about heaven, and the second coming of Christ, or is he talking about the formation of the Canon of Scripture, where we have the ceasing of the sign gifts? There's debate in the body of Christ. I tend to think the latter, although certainly there are parts of this passage that do talk about heaven, where we are going to be known as we are truly known, that kind of thing. But Paul says that prophecies, tongues, and knowledge will cease. They are no longer necessary, because we have the word of God, and in heaven, of course, we'll no longer need those things. Paul says they are temporary. So don't focus on those so much. Focus on love, the "more excellent way," as Paul says at the end of chapter 12.

Paul talks about "when I was a child, I spoke as a child, I acted as a child, I thought as a child." Some people believe that the sign gifts were like those things that a child has. They needed them then. Now that we have the complete Scripture, we can mature. We don't need those things anymore. Other people believe that he's talking about heaven, where our knowledge and our maturity, our lives, will be perfect at that point.

It's interesting that, in verse 13, Paul says, "And now these three abide: faith, hope and love." Now we have faith and hope, don't we? Now we need faith and hope. We have to have faith. That is what pleases God. The book of Hebrews says that without faith it's impossible to please God. And we have hope. We don't yet have the full blown inheritance that we long for. And, of course, Paul in Romans 8 says, "Who hopes for what he already sees," or "already has?" But we have hope. It's a certainty. It's a sure thing, but it's hope nonetheless.

But see, in heaven we won't need faith and hope anymore, will we, because we will be there with Christ for all eternity. And Paul says that the one thing that we will have forever and ever, the greatest of all of these, is love.

Don't despair. All of us fall short. None of us do these things perfectly, do we? And, of course, when we don't, we confess it. We ask Christ's forgiveness. "He is faithful to forgive us all of our sins, and cleanse us from all unrighteousness." But in heaven, in glory, love will be absolutely perfect. Our love for God, our love for one another, is going to be without sin. It's going to be without pretense. It's going to be all of these qualities which I just talked about. We will be perfect forever, and ever, and ever, between us and God, between each other, with perfect bodies and souls, on a perfect earth, in a perfect universe. Amen?

Men: Amen!

Don: Can you fathom that? Well, that's all I have to say. I can't believe I got through all of this. (*Laughter.*) Does anybody have any questions or comments?

Jay: I have a question, Don.

Don: Yes, Jay?

Jay: In regard to prophecy, and at that particular time, whenever Paul is sharing this truth about the spiritual gifts, today, as we tell people about Jesus Christ, we are in a lesser sense prophesying. Would you agree?

Don: Yes. Any time that someone proclaims the word of God, as the Old Testament prophets. They didn't just predict the future. They did that, but that's not all they did.

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“Thus saith the LORD.” You find that all throughout the Old Testament. And so, in that very narrow, limited sense, I would agree with you. The full blown prophecy of Agabus, predicting a famine, I believe that has passed away. Some people may disagree. Tongues, same thing. But yes, I would agree with you there. In the limited sense, we are prophesying when we proclaim the word of God to people.

Participant: Don?

Don: Yes?

Participant: I would like to raise a point about an earlier statement you made, that non-Christians don’t love as we love, and you referenced Muslims in particular. I worked closely with a Muslim graduate when I was at Pitt, and he said to me, “I think I’m loving God more.” Later I talked with a Muslim student at a college up in Erie, and I pointed out to her that the Qu’uran does not talk about the love of God, and she says, “That’s not true,” because I love God. I think the point is that Muslims and Christians can love God, but Muslims do not have the love of God within them. I think that is the distinction—not that we are better lovers than Muslims, but we have the love of God in Christ. It is His life in us that is the thing that loves.

Don: Thank you. There are passages in the Qu’uran that talk about God being loving, but that’s all it says. It doesn’t demonstrate it. Thank you, Ted, for—

Ted: I think the focus needs to be on Christ loving through us, not how much we are loving, versus somebody else.

Don: Okay. Yes?

Participant: I want to thank you for some of these things you said today. I wanted to thank you for doing me a great favor, by reminding me of one of my life verses. When you talk about evangelism, sometimes I kept pushing and pushing and pushing. And proverbs 30:3 says, “For as the churning of milk produces butter, and the twisting of the nose produces blood, so stirring up anger produces strife.” And sometimes I just don’t quit on people. I just keep pushing and pushing, and that’s not love.

Don: Yes. The anger is going to come naturally, because of people’s resistance to the gospel. As a matter of fact, John Gerstner—and he’s the only person I’ve heard say this,—he says that, whereas we are commanded to love the LORD our God, and our neighbors as ourselves, the unbeliever does the exact opposite. It is John Gerstner’s contention that the unbeliever hates God, hates his fellow man, and hates himself most of all.

Now, you say, “What?” All right, he hates God. He either denies His existence, Ted, as you so well put it a couple of months ago, as in militant atheists. Or, he’ll substitute an idol. He’ll worship a false god. He’ll do that. He can’t kill God, obviously, so what does he do? As happens in many parts of the world, he’ll kill the representatives of God and Christ.

He hates his neighbor. What? We know all kinds of people, as I said before, who do loving things, who are nice. But think about it. The non-Christian parent, who raises his child to believe that there is no God, or that God just sends everybody to heaven, is that really a loving thing to do, knowing the consequences for those who do not believe in Christ?

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And he hates himself most of all. He commits spiritual suicide every day, because he is heaping up wrath on the day of wrath. So I thought that what you said, sir, is very appropriate. People are going to get angry at us because of what we stand for, and we don't need to add to it by being obnoxious. That doesn't mean that we're not to evangelize. We certainly are. But let's do it with the right motives. And again, as Ted said so well, none of us do it perfectly. It's the love of Christ within us that enables us to do any of these things, and we have to keep that in mind.

Okay. Well, thank you. It has been wonderful, and Bruce, Lord willing, will return next week.

Let us pray. Father in heaven, what You have taught us today is something that is absolutely impossible for us to do, apart from Your saving work in our lives. And we thank You, Father, that You have given us, because of the new birth, and because of Your work in our lives, by Your grace, now, the capacity to be able, however imperfectly, to love You and to love others with Christlike love. Father, we pray that You would enable us to do that at work, in the body of Christ, in our families, wherever, Lord Jesus. Father, we thank You that it isn't so much, Lord, that we love You, but that You have loved us, and You have given Yourself. And Father, we just thank you for this time. We pray, Father, that You would go with us as we go to our various tasks today. And it's in Jesus' name that we pray. And all the Brave Men said, "Amen!" (*Applause.*)