



CENTRAL SHELBY CHURCH OF CHRIST

working and worshipping together to serve the Lord



*"Jesus answered and said to her,
'Whoever drinks of this water will thirst
again, but whoever drinks of the water that I
shall give him will become in him a fountain of
of water springing up into everlasting life.'" (John 4:13, 14)*

A MORE EXCELLENT WAY

In a local congregation, relationships between brothers and sisters in Christ should be peaceful and loving. Yet the Bible recognizes the fact that the flesh is weak, that disciples will behave carnally at times, and that, therefore, they need instruction on how to behave.

This is seen no clearer than in Paul's first letter to the brethren at Corinth, in his description of how things were in the church there. They were divided over preachers. Some were taking others to court. Still others were using their God-given liberties in a way as to cause their brethren to sin. And then there were the self-inflicted problems with their spiritual gifts, resulting in arrogant attitudes in some, envious feelings in others. To sum things up, it was a divided congregation that desperately needed to unite.

What was God's answer to these seemingly insurmountable problems? Love (1 Corinthians 13). And the Holy Spirit through Paul didn't leave anything to be misunderstood. Notice how He spelled out what love will do (and not do).

Love puts up with a lot. It *"suffers long," "bears all things,"* and *"endures all things."* This in no wise means that a disciple tolerates sin in his brother's life. However, in those matters of judgment which do not involve right or wrong, he is patient.

Love believes the best about a brother. Love *"is not provoked."* Whereas the person in the world might look at the actions of some as a 'call to arms,' the disciple won't allow that to happen. He's not looking for a fight. Rather, he *"believes all things"* about his fellow disciple, always in his mind putting his brother's actions in the best possible light. When some might offer 'proof' about an alleged error in his brother's life, he still continues to *"hope all things"* about him.

Love keeps oneself in a proper perspective. The disciple who loves doesn't look down on others. He doesn't *"parade"* who or what he is, nor is he *"puffed up."* And, if it should seem that some brethren 'have more going for' them than he, he isn't jealous. *"Love does not envy."* Envy would cause him to *"rejoice"* when his brother falls, but love brings him to *"rejoice in the truth."*

Love doesn't want its own way. It *"does not seek its own."* The attitude of some, "It's my way or the highway," is not found in the disciple who loves. This quality of unselfishness causes him to listen to his brother and consider his point of view.

Love is courteous. It is *"kind"* and it *"does not behave rudely."* The disciple who loves does not 'fly off the handle' with his brother or seek to provoke him.

Love forgives. It *"thinks no evil"* -- *"keeps no account of evil"* (NKJV margin). The disciple who loves does not keep a mental ledger of past wrongs suffered, ready to be pulled out at a moment's notice. He doesn't go around with a chip on his shoulder from grievances he has allowed to fester. He forgives and forgets.

Love is "a more excellent way." "Love never fails" when it abides in the Christian. But too often we fail, just like the Corinthians, because we fall short in employing it. Too often we are impatient, proud, suspicious, selfish, rude, and unforgiving -- and carnal, as far as God is concerned. *"For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men?"* (3:3)

God commands us to *"pursue love"* (14:1). Honestly now, do you?

--Mike Noble