

Clothed With Christ -- Love

1. Let's all acknowledge that we are not surprised that a "Clothed with Christ" series would emphasize love. And you also will not be surprised to know that we are going to spend some time in First Corinthians 13 because...well...
2. It was Robert Browning who said "a man's reach should exceed his grasp, else what's a heaven for?" He meant that we were designed by God to be reaching higher than we can reasonably grasp. We look at the horizon and wonder. We see the seas and want to see beneath. We see mountain passes and wonder who and what lies beyond them. We are born explorers.
3. We are also born wanting to be bigger, stronger, better. So, when it comes to love, God gives us a very high target for which to aim. First Corinthians 13:4-7.
4. That is quite a standard. You may consider it unhealthy or unreasonable. Should we always hope? Should we always believe? Where is the place for realism here?
5. It may help to step back and come at this a different way. And when I say "step back" I mean WAY back...all the way back to the story of Creation. Genesis 1:26. The first word is a gift. The second word is a gift.
6. Here is a new word for many of you: Theosis. It means a process through which the people of God become more and more like Him. As Peter would put it (1st Peter 1:4), we "become partakers of the Divine nature."
7. One of the earliest leaders in the second century church, Irenaeus, said "Through his transcendent

love, our Jesus Christ became what we are, that he might make us what he is.”

8. Eastern Orthodoxy spends a lot of time on this while most Protestant Churches ignore it. We worry about being saved; they teach us that God desires more than just salvation for us.
9. In Job, we find out that God desires a deep relationship with us; one that will survive the worst that the devil can throw at us. The devil is convinced that we are not worthy of that relationship; that we will turn away from God.
10. The devil does not believe in us, but God does. God believes in us against all odds. He sees all human history arrayed in front of Him and still... He believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things...
11. And, in the process, we see His love and we struggle towards the light so that we can be like Him. For God is love. First John 4:8-12, 16,17. The only way to change this world is to form ourselves into the image of God; to love like Him.
12. Paul calls us to be completely conformed to the image of Christ. (Romans 8:29) Will we make it there? No...but we are to keep reaching. We are to be true to our being, to the way God created us, and keep reaching, keep wondering, keep exploring, and keep trying to be more like God.
13. That was His purpose in the beginning. “Image and likeness.” The first is the gift. The second is the goal.
14. The sin of Adam and Eve was that they tried to shortcut this. They tried to be like god by eating the fruit, not by love.

15. God had no problem with them being like Him! He just didn't want them to fall for the lies of those who promised shortcuts. Some bind themselves – and others – with oppressive law and discipline, or with demands for precision obedience in worship but there are no examples of any of that working. None of it makes us look and sound more like Jesus.

16. Nothing we can do by our own efforts will produce the love of God in us but that does not excuse us from the task laid before us. We can and must arrive at the state where we can be said to be clothed with love, clothed with Christ. And we cannot take shortcuts – even if they are sacrificial shortcuts.

17. Giving our body to be burned, speaking so wonderfully that it sounds like angels are speaking, knowing everything about the Bible, being a prophet, and giving away all that we own... without love, it is nothing.

18. There is no other route to transformation into the image of Christ than faith, hope, and love. Loving as God loves is hard. (vv.4-7)

19. Want spiritual gifts and incredible worship?
Okay... but that won't form you into the image of Christ. Love will. Love against the odds. Hard love. Difficult love. A love that refuses to quit, refuses to retreat.

20. Our salvation... our hope... is based entirely on God's continuing love. Job's friends told him that God would quit loving him. In fact, they thought the evidence showed God had already stopped loving Job. The devil was convinced that we wouldn't do the hard work of love. He was certain that we would turn from God and run after shortcuts... or

quit in despair when the evidence seems to indicate that our blessings have run out...

21. So God calls us to hope in Him like He hopes in us. He wants us to believe in Him like He believes in us. He wants us to love Him as He loves us...
22. We can pick ourselves up and say "But God believes in me. And since He believes in me, I believe in Him when He tells me I can love like Him." Then, ask yourself what that would look like in the here and now, in your situation, with what you have in your hand.
23. Hard work... but it is the only road to the image of Christ. So let's get started...and remember that we will not do this alone. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit are with us. The cloud of witnesses are with us. They believe in us. Believe in them.