

1 Corinthians 13

Good evening and thank you for joining us. Well tonight we find ourselves in one of the most famous sections of the Bible, the love chapter. Would you please turn to 1 Cor 13?

We only have 3 chapters left, afterward we'll be in 2 Samuel on Wednesday nights.

Just about everyone is familiar with this chapter, both believers and non-believers alike. Many of the words in this chapter can be found in Hallmark cards, in birth announcements and anniversary cards. These verses are also especially quoted at weddings. Countless people from different faiths and backgrounds have said how meaningful and touching these words regarding love are.

The title of tonight's message is For the Love of God

Let's pray

As you know, the word love gets thrown around a lot, often times very carelessly. I'm as guilty of it as everyone else. I love cars, I love boxing, I love reading about micro economics. Yet I also love Kim, I love my kids, I love this fellowship. But obviously those are different kinds of love aren't they-I have different love for Kim than I have for boxing. Sadly, our English language only has 1 word to describe the many different kinds of love.

The kind of love implied by the worlds popular poems and songs bear little resemblance to the meaning of love described throughout the bible, and in particular, 1 Corinthians 13.

Now before we begin it's important to know that Paul uses the ancient Greek word agape throughout this chapter. The Greeks had four different words for love. It's vital we understand the difference between the words, and why the apostle Paul chose the Greek word agape throughout the chapter.

SHOW PIC

4 types of love:

Eros described, as we might guess from the word itself, erotic love. It refers to sexual love.

Storge refers to family love, the kind of love there is between a parent and child, or between family members in general.

Phileo speaks of a brotherly friendship and affection.

Agape is the highest, most pure form of love as a choice, not out of attraction or obligation. Agape love is God's love. **CLOSE PIC**

The word "agape" is used 106 times throughout the New Testament, with the most use in the book of 1 John

Agape is love that loves even when it's rejected. Agape love gives and loves because it wants to.

The type of love that characterizes God is not a sappy, sentimental feeling. God loves because that is His nature and the expression of His being. God loves the unlovable and the unlovely, not because we deserve to be loved or because of any excellence we possess, but because it is His nature to love.

Even though the Corinthian church had an desirable location, countless spiritual gifts and a legacy of superstar teachers, they lacked the one thing they needed the most. Love.

At the close of Chapter 12 Paul tells the church at Corinth to "desire the best gifts." All the gifts of the Spirit are beneficial and important, but spiritual gifts are not the most important issue in church life. As the end of verse 31 of chapter 12 says, there is "a more excellent way..."

The way of love!

You know as we were going through the book of Acts last year I was really praying about having what we typically call an afterglow service. An afterglow is a dedicated time where we allow the gifts of the spirit to be used in an orderly manner.

And I was kinda agonizing over it like Lord I wanna see you move through tongues, and prophecy. I don't know of a time where someone spoke in tongues here and then someone had the interpretation of tongues.

I was wrestling with this like Lord I wanna see you move. But then I remembered- there's a more excellent way-the way of love! And I gotta tell you-this is a very loving fellowship!

The Corinthian Christians were the opposite. They were flaunting their gifts. They were rattling off in tongues, and trying to act spiritual, rather than loving one another. In their fellowship, love had become an afterthought.

The apostle Paul said go ahead and desire gifts-but I show you a more excellent way, a better path to travel. The path of love.

Now the path of love isn't a loving, selfless moment that occurs randomly here or there, rather it's a lifestyle of love that's being discussed here.

It's important to remember that as believers, we're called to be Christ's ambassadors, His representatives. And if we don't love, we're not representing Jesus.

Jesus said if you've seen me, you've seen the Father.

1 John 4:8 He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.

1 Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. SHOW PIC

In the 1960's and 70's a cymbal-banging monkey toy known as Jolly Chimp swept America. When activated, the toy monkey would bang its cymbals together. And although cute at first, after a few seconds the toy would become irritating. **CLOSE PIC**

And without love being the motivator, the gift of tongues produces a similar result-it's just a bunch of noise!

The Corinthians were enamored with spiritual gifts, particularly the gift of tongues. Paul reminds them even the gift of tongues is meaningless without love. Without love, a person may speak with the gift of tongues, but it's nothing but empty noise.

Noisy gongs and clanging cymbals were common in some of the popular pagan cults of Paul's day. They made a lot of noise but no sense.

Sadly if you attend some churches today, their use of the gifts is like a 3 ring circus gone bad. Whooping and hollering, barking, slain in the spirit. **1 Corinthians 14:40 Let all things be done decently and in order.** Again we'll talk more about this next week as we dive into the gift of tongues more in depth in chapter 14.

From time to time I get calls from folks that wanna know what CCC is all about. Specifically, do we believe in the gifts of the spirit...

People will say well I wanna speak in tongues, I won't come to this church if you don't let me give a tongue in the middle of service.

But you never hear of someone saying well I wanna show agape love, I wanna lay my life down and love someone.

See love is always looking for the other person!

2 And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I

could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. Paul doesn't say THEY, the gifts are nothing, no he says I am nothing.

If our church, this fellowship ever fails in our witness to the unbelieving world, it won't be due to a lack of gifts from the HS, our lack of witnessing will be in our lack of love.

Our world is longing for love, so many fears driving everyone's behavior today. So many people are on the verge or in the midst of desperation. We have the thing they are looking for, we have the answer. The love of Jesus which never changes.

It may look desperate out there, but it sets the stage for our lights to shine.

In addition to tongues in verse 1, Paul points out that prophecy, knowledge, and faith to do miracles are likewise irrelevant apart from love. The Corinthian Christians missed the motive and the goal of the gifts, making the gifts their own goal.

Paul draws their focus back to the necessity love.

It's interesting, even faith great enough to remove mountains is not as important as love. And it got me thinking, we often pray 'Lord increase our faith'. But shouldn't we also pray, Lord increase my love?

3 And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned,[fn] but have not love, it profits me nothing. Normally, we would never doubt the spiritual credentials of someone who gave away everything they had for the poor would we? We'd sit back in amazement right? Likewise those who give up their lives' in dramatic martyrdom-if someone died at the stake, set on fire for their faith we are in awe.

But here the Bible tells us those are not the best measures of someone's true spiritual credentials. Love is the best measure.

See the most remarkable efforts of self-sacrifice don't mean they're necessarily done from a root of love. In fact, some self-sacrifice is rooted in pride! Like the guy who says 'did I tell you I sold everything to become a missionary?' Yes you told me 30 times!

Self-sacrifice can be done with many motivations that are not rooted in love. And verse 3 tells us when the final analysis is done, if love wasn't the primary factor, none of it means anything!

Each thing described in these verses are good things. Tongues are good, prophecy and knowledge and faith are good, self sacrifice is good.

But love is so important, that apart from it, every other good thing is useless. So no matter how amazing the gifts may be, if they're not coated and dripping with love then it amounts to nothing.

So how do we know if what we're seeing or doing is truly love?

As we move to verse 4, we're going to see the description of love, what love does and what love doesn't do. And you'll notice that we see love is described by action words, these are all verbs, not just some lofty intellectual concepts. Paul isn't writing about how love feels, he is writing about how love can be seen in action.

Every word here is a verb and a continuous action that describes the behavior of love, not the technical definition.

We'll read all of verse 4 then we'll break it down:

4 Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up;

Love suffers long: John Christostam defined love suffers long as having been genuinely wronged by another human being and having the right to retaliate, they choose not to.

Of course this was modeled by Jesus **John 13:1 Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that His hour had come that He should depart from this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end.**

Over the following few hours, Jesus' disciples will abandon Him. In His moment of greatest need, they'll fall asleep and then flee in fear. They'll even deny they know Him. One of His most trusted men will collaborate to kill Him... yet, Jesus loved His disciples "to the end!" Clearly love suffers long!

...4 Love is kind: it's not harsh or demanding. Love leads, rather than pushes. Love's urgings are respectful, and its prodding's are gentle.

Love does not envy: love never wants the blessing that God chooses for someone else.

Love does not parade itself: love doesn't show-off, or attract attention...

...4 Love isn't puffed up: Love is humble. It doesn't mind picking up a towel and washing some dirty feet.

We'll continue to break the verbs of love down in verse 5:

5 does not behave rudely, kind, not pushy

does not seek its own, it gives preference to one another, not self focused.

is not provoked, doesn't allow itself to be irritated

thinks no evil; It doesn't jump to negative conclusions. It gives the benefit of the doubt.

Verse 6

6 does not rejoice in iniquity, Love doesn't take delight in someone else's sin. It's not rejoicing when someone blows it. Love grieves over iniquity and sin.

So that's 8 things love doesn't do. Now what does love do?

...6 but rejoices in the truth; " Love despises clouds of suspicion - its irritated by gossipy whispers - love celebrates when the truth is made known.

7 bears all things, Love has broad enough shoulders to bear the embarrassment of another person's shortcomings. Love stands up for the person who's fallen.

believes all things, love is the eternal optimist. Love never gives up on what should be and can be! Love sees the potential.

hopes all things, No matter how dark the sky appears or how fierce the storm rages - love believes the sun will shine again. Love knows the night doesn't last forever.

...7 endures all things. Love endures, it pushes through, and it outlasts.

Let's pause for a moment.

We could replace the word love with the name Jesus and the description would make perfect sense. We can easily say, Jesus suffers long and is kind; Jesus does not envy... and make it through the whole chapter.

I'm undone at these words because this is what I'm to look like because this is what love looks like.

Brian suffers long and is kind? nope-failed pretty quickly there! This chapter reveals there are so many un-Christlike things about me!

There's a reason why Paul put this chapter in the midst of his discussion of spiritual gifts. Paul wants the Corinthian Christians to remember that giftedness is not the measure of maturity, the display of love is.

8 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. There will be a time when there is no need prophecies, and tongues, and the gifts of the HS.

Isaiah 11:9 They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain,

For the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD

As the waters cover the sea. There will be a time when there's not a need for the gift of knowledge.

And

Jeremiah 31:34 "No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more."

Verse 9 and 10 expand on this fact that there's coming a time when gifts of the HS will not be needed.

9 For we know in part and we prophesy in part. 10 But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away. Now this is the verse that those who don't believe the gifts of the HS are for today use to deny the continuance of spiritual gifts.

They interpret "that which is perfect " as the NT. The word translated "perfect" means "complete." So, they conclude that

when the NT was finalized, the gifts of the HS are no longer needed.

Yet I believe this is totally inaccurate! The NT was never considered a total revelation of God. In 2 Corinthians 12 Paul mentions seeing things in heaven that were not lawful for him to discuss or write of in the NT. **2 Corinthians 12 3 And I know such a man—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows— 4 how he was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter. 5 Of such a one I will boast; yet of myself I will not boast, except in my infirmities.**

Or how about the seven thunders of **Revelation 10:4 Now when the seven thunders uttered their voices,[fn] I was about to write; but I heard a voice from heaven saying to me,[fn] “Seal up the things which the seven thunders uttered, and do not write them.”**

John was prohibited from recording these words in the NT...

Point being, "that which is complete" isn't the NT. We won't enjoy perfection until we get to heaven. That's when spiritual gifts will cease - when we enter God's glory - then we'll no longer need these special gifts. For now, the gifts of the Spirit are still given by the HS.

11 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. According to NPD Group, this year 14% of all U.S. toy consumers are over the age of 18 — a 20% increase from last year. Build A Bear is creating stuffed animals holding wine and LEGO offering more complex sets for adults. That's another sermon for another time!

Childish things are appropriate for children, and the gifts are appropriate for our present time. But the gifts of the Holy Spirit will not be appropriate forever.

Paul isn't trying to say that if we are spiritually mature, we will not need spiritual gifts. But he does say that if we are spiritually mature, we will not over-emphasize spiritual gifts, especially at the expense of love.

12 For 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

One day, you and I will have perfect fellowship with God.

Today, when we look in a mirror, the image is clear. But in the ancient world, mirrors were made out of polished metal, and the image was always somewhat distorted.

Today we see Jesus only in a hindered way, but one day we will see Him with perfect clarity.

When Christ returns, the distorted images of reality, the mysteries of life, the doctrinal enigmas and the riddles of suffering will all be gone. When we lock eyes with Jesus all our questions will be removed.

1 John 3:2 Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.

13 And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love. The three great pursuits of the Christian life are not "miracles, power, and gifts"; rather they are faith, hope, and love. Though the gifts are precious, and given by the Holy Spirit today, they were never meant to be the focus or goal of our Christian lives. Instead, we're to pursue faith, hope, and love.

When Christ returns, faith and hope will be diminished while love will be intensified. See love, will never fail.

On traditional church calendars, the Thursday before Easter Sunday is called "Maundy Thursday." The word "Maundy" is Latin. It means "the day of the Mandate." It harkens back to the night before Jesus was crucified when He gave His disciples a new commandment - a new mandate. **John 15:12, "This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.**

They were to love one another, even as He had loved them - to the very end. Jesus mandated that love be our motivation. For the follower in Jesus, love needs to be a way of life!

Agape love does not come naturally to us. Because of our fallen nature, we are incapable of producing such a love. If we are to love as God loves, that love—that agape—can only come from its Source.

I can't think of a better time to teach 1 Corinthians 13 than right before Christmas. We celebrate Christmas because of who Jesus is, and what He has done. He traded in heaven for the grimy, urine stench smell of a stable. He exchanged the worship of angels for the companionship of killers.

Those whom Jesus loved laughed in His face. The tongues He made mocked Him. The mouths He made spit at Him and the hands He made crucified Him. The tree He planted was the one He was nailed to.

Jesus' love for us is so vast He went from holding stars to clutching Mary's finger. He went from commanding angels to sleeping in the straw.

Why would God go to such amazing lengths to come to earth in the form a helpless babe? Because that's what love does.

Love puts the beloved before itself.

Our souls were more important than His blood. Our eternal life was more important than His earthly life.

Before Jesus would wear a crown of glory, He first would wear a crown of thorns.

Oh how He loves us!