

Why Community Groups?
Love One Another
9/5/2021

Good morning. My name is Jesse Howard and I serve here at Cornerstone as the associate pastor of music and discipleship. This week brings us to the end of our short three-part series on Community Groups. Two weeks ago, we talked about being created for community. Last week we saw that encouraging, daily Christian fellowship is the antidote to doubt.

This morning I want to look at what the Bible says is THE distinguishing mark of the family of God—love. How do we know we are children of God? How do we know we are disciples of Jesus? How do we know we are living in the community God created us for the way He wants us to? The answer is love. We love one another.

Jesus said in [John 13:34–35](#), “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. 35 By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” This is pretty simple and straight forward, isn’t it? Love one another. I think we can all agree that we *should* love one another. But How? How do we love one another? What does it look like? That is where our passage this morning from 1 Corinthians 13 comes in. How do we love each other, what does love really look like? 1 Corinthians 13 tells us.

This passage describes for us

- I. The Necessity of Love (1–3)
- II. The Qualities of Love (4–7)
- III. The Greatness of Love (8–13)

I. The Necessity of Love (1–3)

Love is perhaps one of the most familiar, and misunderstood concepts in the world. Everyone on this planet is familiar with the idea of love. It would be rare to have anyone disagree that love is a good thing and that we should show it to others. In the world’s misunderstanding of Jesus, I would venture to say that if they think anything about Jesus they would say something like, “Jesus was about love.” A person may utterly reject everything about who Jesus really is, and even doubt that He existed, but still agree that love is important, even necessary. Those who claim Christ, and those who don’t, all seem to agree that love is a good thing.

As familiar as love is to everyone, there is virtually no consensus on what love is. So, before we go any further, let me give you a definition of love so we are all on the same page. There are four Greek words for love, but I am just going to jump the one used here in our passage. The word used here in 1 Corinthians 13 is ἀγάπη, *agapē*. You may be familiar with this word. It’s one of those Greek words that has made its way into our English vernacular, at least within Christian circles.

There is no clear use of this word in classical Greek outside of the NT and ecclesiastical books. It is likely for this reason that the writers of the NT adopted it as the most significant word for love. What does it mean? It means *goodwill, esteem, affectionate regard, or benevolence*. We can narrow that down even further and say that *agape* love is that which seeks the best interest of another.

The definition of love we should have in our minds through this passage is *affectionate regard for someone that seeks their best interest*. Affectionate regard for someone that seeks their best interest. The way you love others is by seeking their best interest. The way God loves us is by seeking our best interest.

Ultimately, the definition of love begins and ends with God. [1 John 4:7–8](#), “Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. [8](#) The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love.” God is love. This does not mean that God does loving things, but that what God does is loving. Love is not a standard outside of God that He must conform to, it is the definition of who He is and what He does. God defines love. Love does not define God.

Love is both an emotion and an act of the will. I think we can swing the pendulum too far on either side when it comes to this. It’s not appropriate to say that love is only an emotion or something we feel. You can love someone, that is, seek their best interest, without having the feelings, or emotions of love. This is how you can [love your enemies as Jesus says in Matthew 5:44](#).

But love is not only an act of the will. I doubt your spouse would appreciate such an idea. Nor does God want you to love Him only as an act of the will. He wants you to love Him with your heart, soul, mind, and strength ([Mark 12:30](#)). This means you can demonstrate love even when you don’t feel like it (because it is an act of your will), but the goal is that you would also have the strong affection (because it is also an emotion). So again, the definition of love is *an affectionate regard for someone that seeks their best interest*.

So, with that definition, let’s look verses 1–3 and see the necessity of love. How, or why is love necessary? If you’re familiar with the book of 1 Corinthians, you know they had a lot of problems. One of those problems was their understanding of the spiritual gifts. Paul takes up this discussion in chapters 12 and 14. They were convinced that God gave spiritual gifts for the purpose of self-promotion. There was a desire to have the “showy” gifts because of the notoriety that came with it. They had totally missed the point. Why does God give spiritual gifts? Just a few verses earlier in [1 Corinthians 12:7](#) Paul says, “But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.” He says in [14:12](#), “Strive to excel in building up the church.” So, the clear purpose of the gifts is that you use them to edify the body. They were *not* given for your own private, personal benefit.

Wedged in between the discussion of the spiritual gifts in chapters 12 and 14 is chapter 13—the chapter on love. Why? Why does he break in his discussion on the gifts for this extended discussion on love? Because love is necessary for the gifts to function properly. If the body is going to operate the way God intended, there must be love. Love is what connects the individual members to each other. Love is what governs the use of each part for the benefit of the whole. Love is necessary for the body to function in unity.

Notice how Paul introduces chapter 13 in the last verse of chapter 12. He says in [12:31](#), “But earnestly desire the greater gifts. And I show you a still more excellent way.” Paul says, “How about instead of using your gifts for showy, self-promotion, you pursue a more excellent way?” What is the more excellent way? Love!

Verses 1–3 read, “If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. 2 If I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. 3 And if I give all my possessions to feed the poor, and if I surrender my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing.”

Paul builds on his argument from chapter 12 and says in effect this: “Let’s just say I had all the “best gifts.” And let’s say I possessed them to the to the fullest measure you can imagine. What good is that without love? Would that serve the body? No. Without love, you are as effective or helpful as a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. I love the musical reference here. Do you know what doesn’t work in a band or a symphony? Self-promotion. You would never want to listen to 50 soloists at the same time! It would just be noise.

I want you to notice *why* love is necessary in these verses because there are two reasons. Verse 1 says without love you are a noisy gong or clanging cymbal. That means love is necessary for you to effectively serve the rest of the body. Your gifts are for the edification of the body. Love ensures you use them for that purpose.

But there is another reason love is necessary in verses 2 and 3. In verse 2 Paul says without love “I am nothing.” In verse 3 he says without love “he profits nothing.” Who loses in that situation? Paul does! Love is necessary for you to live a life that pleases God and benefits you. Without love, even the most gifted person does not benefit the body, or themselves.

Now I know what you’re thinking. You’re thinking, wait! I thought love meant thinking of another person’s best interest, not my own! That’s true! But in God’s economy, living a life of love benefits others and it gives you eternal reward. Remember, Christianity is unique in that it never loses focus on the individual for the sake of the family of God, nor does it ever lose focus on the family of God for the sake of the individual. God never causes harm to someone for the sake of another. When you love others by seeking their best interest, God promises you are seeking your own best interest too. It’s just like marriage. Paul says in [Ephesians 5:28](#), “[So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself.](#)”

The Corinthians were using their gifts to benefit themselves. In the end, this does not benefit the body or the individual. Love is the necessary more excellent way that benefits both the individual and the body. Love should be the lifeblood of everything we do. It should guide us in every conversation. It should drive all our teaching, our learning, our serving, our giving. By God’s grace, I see this kind of love at Cornerstone. We’re not perfect, but there is a lot of love here. And it is a joy to be part of this community. We’ve always got room to grow though, don’t we? By God’s grace, we will. Because love is essential to the body of Christ.

II. The Qualities of Love

Now Paul sets out to describe what biblical love looks like. He gives 15 descriptions. 6 are positive. 9 are negative. We’ve got a big task ahead of us, so let’s briefly look at the qualities one by one. My hope is that God will use these qualities in each of our lives exactly where we need it.

Love is **patient**. This is a compound word. It comes from the word for *long* and the word for *wrath*. It means to suffer long or be forbearing. It is the opposite of responding quickly in wrath or anger. Agape love is patient with others. The implications of this are obvious. How much better would the body function together if we were more patient with one another? One

dictionary defines patience like this, “*to bear up under provocation without complaint.*” What’s hard about patience is that it assumes something is testing your patience!

Thinking about God’s patience will help you be a more patient person. What if God was as “patient” with us as we are with one another? Where would all of us be without the patience of God? We would be in hell. If He were not patient, none of us would have a chance to repent. We must remember that none of us are perfect. All of us have sin. We all make bad decisions. We all drop the ball, whether intentionally or unintentionally. We need to be the kind of people that emulate the patience of our Father with one another. Agape love is patient.

Love is **kind**. I looked this up and one dictionary said it meant, “to be kind.” Other definitions include *loving, gentle, merciful, willing to help or assist*. Similar to patience, thinking about God’s kindness towards us will help us be more kind toward one another. [Luke 6:35](#) ties agape love and kindness together as well. Jesus says, “[But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for He Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil men.](#)” God shows kindness even to those who are ungrateful and evil. Where would we be without the kindness of God? Would you want Him to be as kind as you are with others? Within the body of Christ, we’re supposed to show kindness to each other even when others are not kind. Is it hard to be kind with the people you like and who are kind to you? Not really. Jesus says the tax collectors are good at that too. As members of the body of Christ we should be kind with one another. This doesn’t mean we can’t, or shouldn’t, be direct and honest with each other, but when we are, we are gentle and caring. Agape love is kind.

Love is **not jealous**. Now Paul moves to what love is *not*. This comes from the word *zēlóō*, which is where we get our word zeal. It means *to earnestly desire or have strong affection*. This word can be used positively or negatively. For example, in [2 Corinthians 11:2](#) Paul says, “[For I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy.](#)” God is a jealous God as [Exodus 34:14](#) says. There are good and holy desires, but that is not what Paul is talking about here. This is the kind of desire that wants what another person has for themselves. Or as one dictionary described it, *to have intense negative feelings over another’s achievements or success*. This is what [Acts 7:9](#) describes, “[The patriarchs became jealous of Joseph and sold him into Egypt.](#)” I think we know what jealousy is. Extreme jealousy would be defined as envy and there is a lot of overlap between these two words. Envy is not just when you get upset that someone else has something you want, envy wishes evil on them for it. Jealousy and envy are vicious sins. All they will do is tear the body apart, never build it up.

If we love each other, seeing what someone else has, even if we don’t have it, will bring us joy. If we desire what is best for one another, we will be happy when they get it. Even if you haven’t gotten it. Take physical health. What if you don’t have it and the person next to you does? Jealousy gets upset about it. Jealousy wants what they have, even if it means they lose it. But love praises God for it. Remember, if love is seeking another person’s best interest, it is a tough sell to say you want their best interest while desiring what they have for yourself. A sure test to know when you are not being loving, is jealousy. Agape love is not jealous.

Love **does not brag**. This word is only used here, and it means *to heap praise on oneself, to boast, to vaunt oneself*. This one would have hit the Corinthians right between the eyes. This is the reason for chapter 13. Love doesn’t seek self-promotion; it seeks the promotion of others.

Can you imagine how much better we would be function as the body of Christ if we loved each other like this? Self-promotion is the opposite of agape love.

A good test of this is how much you talk about yourself. I think what drives this kind of incessant self-promotion is insecurity and a lack of trust in God's sovereignty. The guy who is always talking about how great he is, is likely insecure. So, he tries to compensate for it by pointing to himself all the time. The other reason for self-promotion is because we don't trust God to promote us as He sees fit. Jesus said in [Luke 14:11](#), "For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted." Let God promote you if He wants to. Otherwise, don't brag about yourself. Agape love does not brag.

Love is not arrogant. This word means *to puff or blow up, inflate*. It is used only figuratively in the NT to refer to pride of self-conceit. Paul uses this word 6 times in 1 Corinthians. Based on what we have learned about the Corinthians, I think you can see why. What is the difference between bragging and being arrogant? As I said, a person can brag and be quite insecure. The insecure person knows they're not that great and they're trying to hide it. But the arrogant person? They really believe their own hype. Whether or not they say it in a given situation, in their heart, they believe they are truly great. It is impossible for the body of Christ to live together in unity and function the way God designed when arrogance is present.

Think about it. Love and arrogance are mutually exclusive. Arrogance breeds contempt of others. Love breeds concern for others. Arrogance can think of no one else. Love can't stop thinking about others. Agape love seeks to build up others. Arrogance seeks to build up self. How do you eradicate arrogance from your life? You need a proper view of yourself and a proper view of God. Once you see that in Scripture, you will be ready to love. Agape love is not arrogant.

Love does not act unbecomingly. This word is used only here and in 1 Corinthians 7:36. It means *to act uncomely, indecently, disgracefully, or dishonorably*. Multiple translations use the word "rude." This is exactly how the Corinthians were behaving with each other. Whether it was the way the engaged in communion together, the application of the spiritual gifts, or the assembled worship service, it was marked by careless disregard for one another. They were rude and inconsiderate. Does that sound like love? Does that sound like a body that you would want to fellowship with?

Remember, agape love seeks another person's best interest. How can you seek their best interest with a total disregard for them? You can't! Love lives graciously with one another. It lives honorably with one another. The body cannot function with each part carelessly living for itself. Love is what drives gracious and honorable living together. Agape love does not act unbecomingly.

Love does not seek its own. This reads literally, "does not seek the things of itself." Do you ever find yourself saying, "I'll help others when I'm done taking care of all the things I need to do"? Have you finished yet? We're never done with ourselves. We will never start loving others with agape love because we feel like we've accomplished everything we needed to for ourselves first. It's going to happen because we stop seeking our own interests and start seeking the interests of others. There's going to be times you have to say no to yourself and yes to others.

Agape love drives this. What's really beautiful about love is that the interests of others can become your own. It's back to the body metaphor. Serving other parts of the body is a

benefit to that member of the body. If the hand looks at the foot and says, “Whew, looks like gangrene. Yikes. Well, not my problem!” Remember [1 Corinthians 12:26](#), “[And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.](#)” There is nothing wrong with pursuing your own interest, just don’t do it exclusively or at the expense of others. [Philippians 2:4](#) says, “[Do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.](#)” Have you ever met someone who spends so much time looking out for the interest of others that they self-destruct? How does that help the body? It hurts the body. It’s all a beautiful balance. Love is that balance. Agape love does not seek its own.

Love is not provoked. This word is used only here and in [Acts 17:16](#) where it says, “[Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was being provoked within him as he was observing the city full of idols.](#)” It means *to rouse to anger, irritate*. This of course does not rule out righteous anger as Paul felt in [Acts 17:16](#). This is about being provoked over personal offenses. Again, think of this in the context of the body of Christ. What if we stop getting upset over everything that is a slight against us and start displaying agape love to one another?

If I am displaying agape love to you, I will not become irritable with you. We get angry when things don’t go the way we want them to. The focus is on us again. If you are only focused on having your own way, you will be provoked. You will be irritable. Paul says in [Galatians 5:15](#), “[But if you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another.](#)” The end result of a lack of love is consuming one another. That’s not how the body is supposed to live together, is it? Would we want God to have the same short fuse that we often have with one another? No, and thankfully He does not. Agape love is not provoked.

Love does not take into account a wrong suffered. It is interesting to see how different English translations take this verse. The key word being translated here is a word that means *to count, reckon, consider, deem or impute*. It can be used in a numerical calculation, such as when it says Jesus was “[numbered with the transgressors](#)” in [Luke 22:37](#). It can also mean to impute or credit like Paul uses it in [Romans 4:3](#), “[Abraham believed God and it was credited \[or imputed or counted\] to him as righteousness.](#)”

I believe Paul is using this in the accounting or numerical sense. This is the sense of the NASB 1995. When someone hurts you, it goes on the list. The ESV takes it this way also but brings it all down to one word “resentful.” When you keep a record of wrong, when you remember everything a person has done to you that you don’t like, what happens? You become resentful. Do you know what solves the issue of resentment? Get rid of the record!

Would you like it if someone kept a record of the wrongs that you had done? Or how about if God did? Actually, God did have a record of wrong. [Colossians 2:14](#) says that He canceled the record of debt against us by nailing it to the cross. Our record was nailed to the cross. I think we can put away our own personal records against others as well because when it comes to our brothers and sisters in Christ, they’re sins were nailed to the cross too. Don’t keep a record of things that God has put away. Agape love keeps no record of wrong.

Love does not rejoice in unrighteousness but rejoices in the truth. We will take these two together. Why does love not rejoice in unrighteousness? If love is seeking the best interest of another person, what is the best thing for a person? Unrighteousness or the truth? Unrighteousness leads to death! [Jesus said in John 8:32](#), “[And you will know the truth, and the](#)

truth will make you free.” Love encourages one another in the truth. It helps expose lies. It calls each other to a life of righteousness because that is the best possible thing for a person. This may mean, like last week, that we need to confront each other from time to time. Love will do that. Not in an arrogant, prideful way, but in a way that demonstrates we care about the other person. Agape love does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices in the truth.

Love **bears all things**. This word means *to cover closely, protect by covering, conceal, or pass over in silence*. The idea of “bearing” here seems to indicate bearing with others by seeking to protect them against their faults and failures. Love doesn’t just “put up” with someone, it seeks to protect and care for them. **Proverbs 10:12** is a helpful cross reference. **“Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all transgressions.”** In a world of pride and self-promotion people don’t just talk positively about themselves, they talk negatively about others. Love seeks to protect others, not expose them. It seeks to cover offenses, not promote them. It seeks to bear with people through sin, not abandon them to it. Agape love bears all things.

Love **believes all things**. Love trusts. Love is not skeptical. Love doesn’t assume the worst. That is a quick way to destroy a relationship. This does not mean that trust cannot be broken. This does not mean that love is blind or gullible. If there is a person in our midst who has proven themselves to be vicious and divisive, love confronts such a person and protects others against them. But within the body, love assumes the best. And if we can’t assume the best, love is eager to restore a person to the place where it can assume the best again. Agape love believes all things.

Love **hopes all things**. I’m sure it goes without saying, but Paul would not need to say love is patient if you were never presented with situations that try your patience. He wouldn’t tell you it’s not boastful if there weren’t times we were boastful. That’s what makes love so great. It changes our response in the midst of difficult situations. There are going to be times in the body of Christ where things don’t go as they should. What does love do? Love hopes. A difficult relationship? Love hopes. A sinning brother or sister? Love hopes? A hurtful word? Love hopes. A wrong suffered? Love hopes. A broken marriage? Love hopes. Why does love hope? Because love hopes in God and with God, there is always hope! Agape love hopes all things.

Love **endures all things**. The word endure is a compound word. It comes from the word *to remain or stay*, and the word *under*. It means to remain under. Under pressure, love does not give up. It does not give in. Love perseveres, endures, suffers patiently, and holds firm. Talk about a quality that is absent from our world today. Endure? We don’t endure anything. The slightest difficulty, the moment of resistance, the prospect of suffering, and our culture just complains, demanding something better. We are not an enduring culture.

But love, agape love, never stops. It doesn’t get tired. It doesn’t say, enough is enough. I’ve loved for a time, but no longer! Again, would we want God to love us that way? Or are we amazed that God loves us with an enduring love? If we’re going to live together as the family of God, we are going to need a love that endures. It will not always be easy, but with love, we will endure with one another. That is the kind of love that holds the body of Christ together! Agape love endures all things.

That is a lot of qualities! What do we do with this? Well first, we repent because we fall short of this love, don't we? This is a needful, but hard passage to study because of how it exposes our lack of love, myself included. Practically, just pick one quality this week. Just focus on one. Pick patience or watch for the ways you keep a record of wrong. Pick one and try to grow in agape love by the power of the Holy Spirit.

I want to encourage you that love is evident here at Cornerstone. Not perfectly of course, but I see so much love here. And I want to encourage you to get involved in Community Groups so you too can experience that kind of love. Agape love happens best in small groups. So let us strive towards this kind of love in the family of God. Let us strive for Cornerstone Community Church to be known as a people that love one another. And when people see this love, they will know that we are truly disciples of Christ. Finally, let's briefly look at the greatness of love.

III. The Greatness of love

In verses 8–13, Paul concludes this chapter on love by talking about the greatness of love. It should already be apparent that love is the supreme characteristic we should strive for as believers, but in case we missed it, Paul makes it very clear. In verse 8 he says, “love never fails.” Love never falls, comes short, or dies. It is permanent. There will never be a time where love is gone or is no longer needed. Paul is not saying that as long as you love, it will accomplish everything you want. He is speaking to the *permanence* of love, particularly as it stands against the “showy” spiritual gifts. We believe at Cornerstone that the miraculous sign gifts have ceased with the close of the New Testament. But do you know what hasn't ceased? Love. And it never will. Agape love is still the defining characteristic of the body of Christ. Agape love is still the glue that holds the body together. It is still the means by which each member serves the body at large. It is the greatest characteristic we need in the body of Christ now.

And, as [verse 13 says](#), it is the greatest characteristic that will be present for all eternity. “[But now faith, hope, love, abide these three; but the greatest of these is love.](#)” I take this to mean that love continues eternally. Love abides forever.

Love is never going to end because God is love. Love will guide and govern the people of God for all eternity. Can you imagine it? An eternity living in fellowship with the God of love and in fellowship with each other in perfect, unblemished love? Our love will no longer be tainted with sin, either for God or for one another. There will be no boasting, no self-promotion, no destructive self-seeking. We will love one another the way Christ has loved us. That is just a piece of the glory of Heaven. As we wait for that day when our love is perfected, let us strive to grow in love for one another.