

Sermon – Love, Everlasting

35 minutes (? minutes allowed plus ?)

For Sunday, 11/06/22:

- 1) Series Context: Part of the series “The Cross into our Chaos” – a study in 1 Corinthians)
 - a) Series Overview:
- 2) Sermon Title: *Love, Everlasting*
- 3) Text: 1 Corinthians 13
 - a) **The Way of Love**
 - b) *13 If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. ² And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. ³ If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned,^[a] but have not love, I gain nothing.*
 - c) *⁴ Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant ⁵ or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful,^[b] ⁶ it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. ⁷ Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.*
 - d) *⁸ Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. ⁹ For we know in part and we prophesy in part, ¹⁰ but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away. ¹¹ When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways. ¹² For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.*
 - e) *¹³ So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.*
- 4) Special Reading: The Way of Love (A Liturgical Reading)
- 5) Medimemo: NA
- 6) Theme: Love (in the context of the church and spiritual gifts)
- 7) Goal(s):
 - a) Preach the text
 - b) Do I use occasion to “highlight” anything? No
 - c) ?Motivate hearers towards next steps –
 - d) Foreshadow – The Lord’s Supper
- 8) Main Point & Encouragements:
 - a) Main Point: Reflecting God’s nature, gospel love should be the priority and proof of growing spiritual maturity within our gospel community permanently.
 - a) Encouragement #1: 1 Corinthians 13:1-3 – The Priority of Love:
 - i) Gospel love in community is the highest priority of growing spiritual maturity. (So let’s desire it more...)
 - b) Encouragement #2: 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 – The Proofs of Love:
 - i) Gospel love in community is the proof of growing spiritual maturity. (So let’s demonstrate it more...)
 - c) Encouragement #3: 1 Corinthians 13:8-13 – The Permanence of Love:
 - i) Gospel love is the eternal reflection of God’s character (So let’s trust Him more...)

1.5 minutes - Announcements

35 minutes - Sermon

1.5 minutes – Prayer & Invitation to Prayer

OUTLINE (1.5 + 35 + 1.5 minutes budgeted):

Seque (1.5 Minute): Music x2 (Matheus), Announcements – Tanner, Responsive Reading – Tim Tran

- 1) Responsive Reading, then integrate Scripture in the Sermon Body (Scripture Reading: 1 Corinthians 13)

Introduction (5.0 Minutes)

- 1) Greeting
- 2) Background
- 3) Prayer of Consecration

Main Body – Teaching (25.0 Minutes):

- 1) Encouragement #1: 1 Corinthians 13:1-3 – The Priority of Love: (8 minutes)
 - a) Gospel love in community is the highest priority of growing spiritual maturity. (So let’s desire it more...)
- 2) Encouragement #2: 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 – The Proofs of Love: (8 minutes)
 - a) Gospel love in community is the proof of growing spiritual maturity. (So let’s demonstrate it more...)
- 3) Encouragement #3: 1 Corinthians 13:8-13 – The Permanence of Love: (8 minutes)
 - a) Gospel love is the eternal reflection of God’s nature (So let’s trust Him more...)
- 4) Transition (1 minute)

Conclusion (5.0 Minutes)

- 1) Main Point (reinforced):
 - a) Reflecting God’s nature, gospel love should be the priority and proof of growing spiritual maturity within our gospel community permanently.
- 2) Final Exhortation – Call to Action – Invitation – Next Steps

Invitation to Respond & Prayer (1.5 Minutes)

- 1) Pray...

Seque: The Lord’s Supper, then Song 3

Sermon – *Love, Everlasting*

36.5 minutes (35.0 minutes allowed plus 1.5 Response)

INTRODUCTION (5.0 minutes):

1) Greetings:

- a) Good morning. My name is John Reddy...
- b) Thank you, Tim, for leading us in that responsive reading.

2) Introductory Thoughts:

- a) Perhaps, as you were hearing and responding to this morning's Scripture, 1 Corinthians Chapter 13, your mind drifted to some Wedding that you attended where significant portions of this text were read – even as 2 individuals were celebrating the consummation of their stated “love” for each in the bonds of Holy Matrimony.
- b) I can understand why portions of this text are chosen. The author, the Apostle Paul writes in a wonderful poetic fashion about a topic that is completely relevant for 2 people looking to live in covenant community with each other for the rest of their lives.
- c) But... I do have a concern.... I suspect that for many of us, the use and application at Weddings skews our understanding of what Paul is really trying to impress upon the Corinthian believers... and by extension, those of us gathered here this morning.

3) Overview:

- a) Let's begin by thinking about where we have been recently in our journey through 1 Corinthians and how this particular chapter fits in to that flow.
- b) Starting in Chapter 8, the Apostle Paul confronts what he sees as a growing faction of **elitists** - ones who claim to have superior “knowledge” and spiritual practice as compared to others... especially when it came to food sacrificed to idols.
 - i) In that chapter, Paul contrasts this so-called “knowledge” with the marker of “love”.
 - ii) There he helps us to see that “love outshines knowledge” because pride elevates oneself whereas love lifts up others.
- c) In Chapter 9, using himself as an example and pointing to Jesus, Paul teaches that love rightly displayed by a follower of Christ often causes that follower of Christ to limit their personal freedom for the sake of another perhaps “weaker” person.
- d) Chapter 10 goes on to make it clear that “*whatever you do, do all to the glory of God*”.
- e) Then, beginning in Chapter 11, the Apostle Paul shifts his attention to what these principles may look like when Christians are gathered together for corporate worship – much like we are doing today.
 - i) In Chapter 11, Paul addresses corporate worship through the issues of head coverings as well as the Lord's Supper.
 - ii) Then, as we heard last week, in Chapter 12, he addresses the proper use of spiritual gifts or grace-gifts in corporate worship when he reminds us in verse 7 that “...*to each is given the manifestation of the Spirit [Why?] ... for the common good.*”

- iii) And looking forward to next Sunday, he'll continue that theme as he continues to teach about other grace-gifts and their proper use within the Body of Christ in Ch 14.
- f) But here, in Chapter 13, Paul stops to lay a crucial foundational building block for corporate life as a church. In fact, many argue that it is the climax to Paul's overall discussion about life in community ...as a church ...as gathered followers of Jesus.
 - i) Grace-gifts and all other aspects of community life for the follower of Jesus "*only make sense when used in a context where people are marked out as "the Lord's" by "love" (agape).*" Let me repeat that...
- g) 1 Corinthians 13 is Paul's 2nd chance to echo what he first made plain in 1 Corinthians 8.
 - i) That "knowledge" puffs up, but love builds up" (1 Cor 8:1b)
 - ii) What he declared there is so important for us to understand and so often violated that he covers it again in Chapter 13 – right in the middle of all kinds of teaching on church life.
 - iii) ...Even in this Chapter 13, he repeats himself multiple times and in multiple ways.
 - iv) Agape (or love) is specifically mentioned 10 times in this chapter.
 - v) It's implied in almost every sentence.
 - vi) It's as though he really, really wanted his readers to "get it".
 - vii) In his appeal, Paul is not only theological but... he is emotional in his rhetoric too!
- h) Why? Why so much repetition... so much attention... so much emotion?
 - i) Because the misguided practices and wrong attitudes of Christian Elitists in the Corinth church had begun to infiltrate and even dominate that church's culture.
 - ii) It was a real threat then... and, might I suggest, that is a real threat today too.
 - iii) We live in an American culture where the autonomy and rights of the "individual" has so totally dominated our consciousness that oftentimes we hardly know how to live in community – whether that is in our families, our neighborhoods, our workplaces, and – yes – even our churches.
 - iv) Truth is, I probably should have started our Scripture reading with 1 Cor 12:31b – "I am showing you a still more excellent way" – because with that transitional phrase, the Apostle Paul sets the tone and tells us what Chapter 13 is all about... a more excellent way...

4) Prayer of Consecration:

- a) So I invite you to bow your heads and repeat after me as I pray:
 - i) *Heavenly Father... Speak to My Heart... And Change my Life... Amen...*

MAIN BODY – ENCOURAGEMENT #1 The Priority of Love – (8.0 min of 25.0 minutes):

- 1) As the Apostle Paul ended 1 Corinthians 12, a chapter deeply detailing spiritual gifts in the church, he promised in his last verse that he was going to show the Corinthians “*a still more excellent way*” – what many refer to when thinking about chapter 13 as “the way of love” (See 1 Corinthians 12:31b).
- 2) Then, right at the beginning of chapter 13, in verses 1-3, he uses a number of word-pictures and themes that help illustrate my first encouragement of the morning:
 - a) *Gospel love in community is the highest priority of growing spiritual maturity. (So let’s desire it more...)*
- 3) Beginning in verse 1, Paul personalizes when he writes:
 - a) **13** *If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.*
 - b) Simply put, even if believers speak in the most exalted languages imaginable, if they do not have love they are like instruments that make an annoying and irritating sound.
 - i) For me, it would be like fingernails on a chalkboard or squeezing one of those bike horns.
 - c) And, I wonder if tongues is probably the first gift mentioned here because the Corinthians had using and emphasizing it without love... in a most grievous, calloused manner.
 - d) In fact, it has been suggested that the reference to the languages of angels indicates that some of the Corinthians believed that they even occupied an exalted spiritual place because of its manifestation.
 - e) It appears that some Corinthians had forgotten that spiritual gifts were given by God to build up the church not divide it. Those gifts were to communicate God’s power and His presence amongst His people.
- 4) In case the reader didn’t quite “get it”, Paul continues by writing using hyperbolic or extreme language and examples in verse 2:
- 5) .² *And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am _____* [Pause - wait for the congregation to say, “nothing”; even repeat if necessary).
 - a) That’s right, “nothing”.
 - b) Prophetic powers – even if I can hear God’s voice and serve as His mouthpiece through the Word or through spontaneous revelation in the moment...
 - i) I am nothing!
 - c) Understanding ALL mysteries? Understanding ALL knowledge? Perhaps aspects of the plan of salvation applied to the local church?
 - i) Nothing!
 - d) Having ALL faith – even the type that can wipe out a mountain...
 - i) Nothing!
 - ii) Jesus also spoke of faith moving mountains (Matt 17:20; Mark 11:23), but the context seems quite different since Jesus correlates mountain-moving faith with a very small amount of faith (faith like a

mustard seed). Jesus then seems to refer to the faith of all believers, while Paul describes a gift of faith – a gift soooo extraordinary that insuperable obstacles are displaced.

iii) None of these powerful and miraculous acts demonstrate that I am fully operating within the center of God’s call on my life.

iv) Nothing! Paul’s repetitious use of ALL hammers that into our heads.

6) Well, you may ask, what if I act really, really sacrificial?

a) Look at verse 3 where Paul anticipates that question and the text escalates as it considers two further acts which SEEM to be the very definition of love.

i) ³ *If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned,^[a] but have not love, I gain nothing.*

b) It appears that the simple answer is... Nope! Without being motivated by and demonstrated through love, it is... Nothing!

c) We must remember that in Matthew 6, Jesus warns that people may give to secure a good reputation before others instead of for God’s sake or out of love for others (See Matt 6:2).

d) I think no one can deny that the most extreme form of sacrifice might be surrendering your actual body or life to suffer the horrors of being burned alive.

i) That image may bring some of us to remember the story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the book of Daniel when they took a stand of faith and yielded their bodies to the flames rather than recount their faith in God.

ii) For others, we hear the listing of Hebrews 11 “Faith Hall of Fame” where it is acknowledged that some had “quenched the power of fire” while others were “tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life. (See Dan 3:19-23; Heb 11:34).

iii) Still, Paul envisions situations where even such remarkable self-sacrifice is not loving.

(1) Giving up one’s own life may seem to be loving, but it is not loving if one does so to boast about one’s sacrificial spirit.

iv) In these cases, the Bible makes it plain that love cannot be measured by actions alone; motives must be assessed to determine what is loving (see also 1 Cor 4:4-5)

e) The way that we are to love is the way that Jesus loved:

i) *“A new commandment I give to you, ‘that you love one another’ just as I have loved you, you are to also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples...” [John 13:34-35b]*

i) A person is not measured by his or her gifts but by love... without love a person is nothing! And, therefore, it should be a priority for each one of us. My prayer for us this morning is that each one of us experiences a hunger to make the love of Father, demonstrated by the example of Jesus, and empowered by His Spirit, the central motivation of all that we do within the life of this church.

MAIN BODY – ENCOURAGEMENT #2 – The Proofs of Love (8.0 min of 25.0 minutes):

- 1) But... What does love look like? That seems like a fair question for the Corinthians to have asked, doesn't it? Maybe you are sitting there asking yourself that question...
- 2) In our culture today, we have the common phrase, "Love is Love". And, although I understand what someone is trying to say when they use that phrase, it's really not the useful nor instructional if you are trying to define love itself, right?
- 3) According to the renowned Philosopher, Tina Turner: *"What's love got to do with it... got to do with it... What's love but a second hand emotion..."*
 - a) Donna Summer "feels love" while others sing that "Love is like Oxygen".
 - b) McCartney wants to fill the world with "Silly Love Songs" even as Benatar insists that "Love is a Battlefield".
 - c) The Bee Gees wanted to know "How Deep is Your Love", Beyonce is "Crazy in Love", and "Your Love Keeps Lifting (Jackie Wilson) Higher and Higher.
 - d) "Love... Love Will Keep Us Together" (Captain & Tenille), and "All You Need Is Love" (The Beatles).
 - e) Foreigner wanted "~~H~~ Want to Know What Love Is" while Adele was going to "Make You Feel Her Love".
 - f) According to Kelsea Ballerini, I guess "Love is a Cowboy".
 - g) Our culture is obsessed and sings about love all the time.
 - h) And, yet... my observation is that we are soooooo confused about what love really is.
 - i) For most in our culture (and in our churches, I'm afraid), Love either is about S-E-X or its about Sentimentality.
 - j) However, in Chapter 13, the Apostle Paul offers a truer picture of Love.
 - k) One that accounts for both steadfastness and sacrifice – 2 key biblical virtues.
- 4) ⁴ *Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant ⁵ or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful;*
⁶ *it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth.*
⁷ *Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.*
- 5) In this list of 15 different qualities of love, Paul helps readers to discern the true nature of genuine love. Certainly, this is not an exhaustive list but one that is representative of key attributes critical to a thriving communal life.
- 6) Not surprising, Paul shares his list using a common poetic structure where he lists what love IS, then lists twice what love IS NOT, then finishes with what love IS.
- 7) According to Paul, love lived in community IS:
 - a) Patient... it is kind...
 - i) It points towards what he wrote to the Galatians when he said, "
 - b) ²² *...the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. [Gal 5:22-23]*
 - i) If, and when, we claim to have some sort of spiritual superiority over someone else because of some kind of giftedness, it would be wise for us to check ourselves according to the Spirit's final checklist... character trumps results everytime.

- c) In verse 7, Paul links love with the terms “*believes all things*” and “*hopes all things*” which are sandwiched between “*bears all things*” and “*endures all things*”.
- d) This love-sandwich refers to a faith and a hope in God that he is working in the lives of other people over time and, therefore, we are free to trust in Him to complete the work that He has begun and will be faithful to complete. Love believes the best of others within our church community and also hopes the best for them.
- e) While we live in community, we continuously want to ask how we can participate in what great things God is doing in another person’s life but... we can surrender the final responsibility for God’s transformative work to the one it properly belongs to... namely, the work of the Holy Spirit in the name of Jesus the Son to the glory of God the Father.
- i) Can I get an “amen”?
- f) As a practical matter, may I suggest that whenever you think of another brother or sister-in-Christ, especially one that may be getting under your skin, sincerely pray for them by asking God to give you greater measure of these seven qualities.
- g) Then, ask God to help you express that kind of love – ever-patient, ever-kind, ever-hopeful – to the one that you are praying for. Can you imagine the impact! [Pause]
- h) For the church, Paul also gives us eight characteristics of what love IS NOT:
- i) *Love does not envy* or have an overwhelming zeal for someone else’s status...
- ii) *It does not boast* or strive for all the wrong things for the sake of public declaration...
- iii) *It is not arrogant* because there is no basis... gifts displayed are gifts received...
- iv) *It is not rude* nor unseemly or exclusive in the way one behaves towards another...
- v) *It does not insist on its own way*... it gives up rights + seeks benefit of another 1st...
- vi) *It is not irritable or resentful* ... it does not seek a posture waiting to be hurt... it is not easily provoked
- vii) ⁶*it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth*... capturing the mathematical nature of the Greek wording here, some translations say, “keeps no record of wrongs”... remember, forgiveness is not granted if an accounting record of offenses is maintained...
- i) As a practical matter, may I suggest that if any auditing of accounts or record-keeping is to be maintained within the relationships of the church, perhaps the practice of conducting a self-audit is the more godly way of keeping track.
- j) In other words, it may be helpful to use Paul’s list here as a “checklist” before our Lord when we are praying for greater maturity in our corporate relationship.
- 8) You see, my 2nd Encouragement for us this morning is this: **Gospel love in community is the proof of growing spiritual maturity. (So let’s demonstrate it more...)**
- 9) Again, when studying Paul’s words here, we must keep in mind that these searching and beautiful words are primarily designed to help churches use spiritual gifts wisely and live together in community peaceably.
- 10) And that the true measure or mark of spiritual maturity is... love!
- a) Love is the goal of Paul’s teaching to Timothy. [1 Tim 1:5]
- b) All the instructions of the law can be summarized in the command to love one’s neighbors (including the “neighbors” in your church). [Rm 13:8-14; Gal 5:14]

- c) All the biblical virtues are bound up with love. [Col 3:14]
 - d) Paul's lists of virtues start with love. [Rom 12:9, Gal 5:22]
 - e) Love, after all, expresses the love Christ demonstrated in giving his life for the sake of human beings; thus believers should also live in loving ways. [Eph 5:2, 1 Thess 4:10]
- 11) Summarizing this list may be difficult, but we can say with certainty that love is not self-absorbed, that it always seeks the good of others, that it cherishes the truth and that it is optimistic (but never naïve).
- 12) Love is not just something you feel but... love is something you DO!
- a) Patient... you don't feel patient, you wait in hope
 - b) Kind... you don't feel kind, you act with compassion
 - c) No records... you tear up your list!
- 13) Why does the Apostle Paul spend some much time (an entire chapter) on "love"?
- 14) Cuz it can be hard to do in the context of the local church!
- 15) Since the Fall of Man in Genesis 3, love was corrupted and is no longer natural to us.
- a) Our definitions are deficient.
 - b) Most of our examples are wrong; biblical exhortations seem counter-intuitive for us.
 - c) Many of our influences teach myths about the true nature of love.
 - d) In the brokenness of this world, many of us have our capacity to truly love impaired not only by sin and corruption in general; but also through trauma and woundedness, discouragement and disappointment at the hands of others.
- 16) To make things even more complicated, when we experience the saving power of Christ at the cross, we still have the life-time work of being transformed by His Spirit into His image.
- a) And so, we bring the effects of those hurtful or selfish events into the life of the church.
 - b) Oftentimes, we were never really taught or even talked about healthy "Conflict Resolution"... Many of us are not very good at it...
 - c) And often, we assume that healthy congregational life will just sort of... "happen".
 - d) Nope! We gotta see it... want it... pursue it... build it...
- 17) Individual freedom, self-expression, and personal happiness as the "highest good"... may I say as the "greatest God"... should be right-sized in the life of the Church... as the demonstration of love for one another because the best indicator of our growth in Christ over time.
- 18) My prayer for us this morning is that as we hear the truth of God's Word about what life as the Body of Christ should be like that we'll see how Paul's list has been shaped by the person and work of Jesus Christ.
- a) And, as His followers, that we commit to living as He lived... and treating each other as He wants us to treat each other.
 - b) And, as we do that, it will echo beyond our gatherings and into the classrooms, conference rooms, and living rooms of Medford and beyond.

MAIN BODY – ENCOURAGEMENT #3 – The Permanence of Love (8.0 min of 25 min):

- 1) And as we lean into loving more, regardless of the number or nature of our gifts, let's lay hold of my final encouragement:
 - a) **Gospel love is the eternal reflection of God's character (So let's trust Him more...)**

- 2) Let's look at our Scripture again starting with verse 8:
- a) ⁸ *Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. ⁹ For we know in part and we prophesy in part, ¹⁰ but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away.*
 - b) The theme of this verse is the love is everlasting... it is eternal... it never ends...
 - c) Prophecy and knowledge are restricted to "this age"...
 - d) Why? Because both of them are partial and incomplete. (not mixed with error but that neither is exhaustive nor tells the whole story. [See Job 11:7-8]
 - e) Some scholars hold that miraculous gifts such as prophecy, healing, tongues, interpretation, and miracles were given to authenticate the apostles and their writings in the early years of the church, but those gifts "ceased" once the entire NT was written and the apostles died (c. AD 100).
 - i) I object because even though Paul knew his words and writings were authoritative, he had NO conception that they would be collected and included in the NT for hundreds and thousands of years.
 - f) Rather, I hold that Paul expected these gifts to continue until Christ returns – the time when all God's purposes for human beings will be realized and fulfilled.
 - g) As wonderful as grace-gifts are, they are provisional and partial. When perfection arrives, they will be left behind for ever.
- 3) ¹¹ *When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways. ¹² For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.*
- a) Here the Apostle Paul uses some illustrations to further make his point. First, he contrasts his own childhood with his own adulthood.
 - b) The verb "gave up" (katargeo) is the same in verse 8 – to cease – and appears to be about more than just his life... rather he again is writing metaphorically about the coming of the end of this age...
 - c) He's saying that this period of childhood is compared to this present age, this present era, when spiritual gifts like prophecy, tongues, and knowledge are needed because we are still in infancy.
 - d) In case we don't see what his point, Paul uses the metaphor of a mirror.
 - e) Ancient mirrors were made from polished metal (such as bronze), and thus one's reflection was even more "dimly" or "darkly" or "indistinctly" or "indirectly" than in modern mirrors.
 - f) You see, with the aid of spiritual gifts believers really and truly see... but their sight is incomplete and partial.
 - g) Rather than seeing dimly or incompletely or partially through spiritual gifts, Paul says that there will be a day when we will see clearly and completely and fully.
 - h) It is the day when we see "face-to-face"!

- i) There is an “age to come” that is better than “this present age”.
- j) The Perfect of verse 10 will be seeing Jesus face-to-face at his future coming. The Apostle John knew this and said to other Christians in one of his letters:
 - i) ² *Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. [1 John 3:2]*
- k) “...*we shall be like him*...” What does that sound like to you?... Sounds like “maturity” to me... for the follower of Jesus Christ, it sounds like “adulthood”, doesn’t it?
- l) And, can you imagine what seeing him face-to-face will be like? [Pause]
- m) Hearing that phrase “face-to-face”, my mind goes back to God-Encounters in the Bible.
 - i) Jacob wrestling with God in Genesis 32 (Gen 32:30)
 - ii) Gideon’s encounter with the angel of the Lord in Judges 6 (Judges 6:22)
 - iii) Moses knowing the Lord ‘face to face’ in Deuteronomy 34 (Deut 34:10)
- n) And, one day... John Reddy in some future time... I’ve already told the Elders that when the day comes that they preside over my funeral, I want an old-timey PromiseKeeper’s Men anthem sung or played at the service.
- o) It’s called “In That Day”.

*My heart’s burning for that day... When I’ll see You face to face
I’ll keep watching and waiting... Staying focused on Your Word
I will see You... I will touch You
You will hold me... In that day*
- p) You see “in that day”, the spiritual gifts that God has deposited in me will no longer be needed. The gifts will become useless, not because they are inherently bad, but because they are partial and incomplete. A greater reality is coming, and the gifts will be forgotten as the glory which the gifts point to arrives!
- q) Spiritual gifts will be like *stars fading into the background in the light of the rising sun* – namely, Jesus!
- r) And, just as God knows me fully now, so I will fully comprehend and understand in the future. Saying that I will fully know does not mean that I will enjoy infinite knowledge, as if I will become omniscient as God is omniscient. The illustration of childhood and adulthood assists me here. I will come to maturity in their knowledge and understanding.
- s) And so will you... if you have surrendered your life to Jesus.
- a) And you know what will remain “in that day”? The Love of God!

2) ¹³ *So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.*

- a) Life in the coming age will continue to be marked by trust in God and hope in God.
- b) Believers will continue to rely upon him, and they will look forward to the future with anticipation.
- c) But, Love is greatest because it is the purpose and goal of faith and hope. Faith rests in and relies upon God who in His great love sent His Son for the forgiveness of sins (Rom 8:32).
- d) Hope looks forward to enjoying a relationship with God in Christ through the Spirit for all eternity.

- e) But Love revels in the beloved and finds satisfaction and joy in Him.
- 3) My prayer for us this morning is that we will recognize that the truest mark of the believer is love because it is His true nature and should be ours as well.
- 4) Repeatedly, the Psalmists declare “his steadfast love endures forever”.
- 5) Lord, make us mature in our love for You and for one another.

CONCLUSION (5.0 minutes):

- 1) I appreciate an observation made by Pastor James Emory White about our topic this morning. He wrote:
 - a) *We live in a day of deeply contentious disagreement on any number of things, but most of it is political in nature or over things that, while not overtly political, have been politicized. When we disagree with each other, we have two choices: We can maintain the ultimate mark of the Christian, or we can abandon and betray it.*
 - b) Tough words for sure but... can I ask you?
 - c) How are you doing? Is love the mark of your life in community? Or, are you tempted to abandon or even betray it? Strong words but... it needs to be asked...
 - i) As a follower of Christ... one who has been adopted by God the Father through the power of the Holy Spirit upon the confession of Jesus Christ as Lord... one who now lives in the new community known as Redemption Hill Church... Is it love that marks your life in that new community? [Pause]
 - d) In his last extensive time of teaching with his core of disciples... before facing the cruelty of the crucifixion that laid before him... Jesus interceded before the Father in the presence of his disciples on behalf of his followers.
 - e) The Apostle John tells us that our Lord prayed,
 - i) *“¹⁸As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. ¹⁹And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth. ²⁰“I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, ²¹that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.” (John 17:18-21)*
 - f) Did you catch what Jesus said?
 - i) That the hope of the world... the possibility that the sacrifice of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sin and the potential for right relationship with God the Father... would be authenticated by one thing... this one thing would confirm the truth of the gospel before a world that is watching... and that thing is... the loving unity that a confessing body of believers...
 - g) History tells us that the rapid and massive expansion of the gospel throughout the Roman Empire was largely fueled by the culture-busting lifestyle of love for one another that was the fulfillment of the very words of Jesus as He prayed.
 - h) This loving unity does not mean that every point of Christian living is in total agreement. It doesn't mean that conflict never arises. It doesn't mean that we cannot celebrate our convictions or wide-ranging differences. Rather, loving unity – as Paul teaches here in 1 Corinthians 13 flows from a

oneness of the heart leading to relational unity. That oneness transcends individual giftedness or ethnic origin or any other unique feature of your life that you can name.

- i) This loving unity is not simply an acknowledgement in our heads that love is important. Nor is it just a feeling in our hearts that makes us experience fondness. Rather, it both “Head & Heart” that then compels us to action. Love demonstrates love! And, in that demonstration, we are mutually blessed but, more importantly, others far from God see... Him and... just how much we really do know Him...
- 2) So, I suggest that what Paul is trying to tell us in 1 Corinthians 13 (the Main Point) is this:
 - a) **Reflecting God’s nature, gospel love should be the priority and proof of growing spiritual maturity within our gospel community permanently.**
 - 3) Last year, the Elders decided that it would be helpful to articulate what traits a growing follower of Jesus would want to cultivate as they moved towards greater maturity and Christ-likeness. We call that journey, “The 7 Pursuits”.
 - a) Pursuit Number 5 is: A Commitment To Loving and Caring Relationship
 - i) The healthy church and its members should be intentional in its efforts to build loving, caring relationships within families, between members, and within the community we serve.
 - b) It is one of the reasons that you so often hear us exhort all of us to:
 - i) Come on Sundays and worship God together regularly.
 - ii) Connect with a Group where you can know others and be known yourself.
 - iii) Join a Team so you can use your unique giftedness in community with others.
 - iv) Give Generously all of us can have its needs met and fund our mutual mission.
 - c) It may seem obvious but I’m gonna say it.
 - d) If, as we’ve heard from the Scripture this morning,
 - i) We are a new community and...
 - ii) Jesus prayed that we’d demonstrate loving unity one to another...
 - iii) So that the world would see the truth of His love for us... and by extension for themselves...
 - e) Then, how will we fulfill that if we are not with each other at least some of the time?
 - 4) The Corinthian Church “knew” Jesus but... were struggling to live out the purity and unity of Jesus as the Body of Christ with the Father’s love as their foundation.
 - a) Do you ever feel that way?
 - 5) Final Exhortation... Call To action! Next Steps
 - a) Dallas Willard’s *Renovation of the Heart* how all people are spiritually formed and how Christians specifically are formed by the Spirit of God.
 - i) In regards to being a truly kind and patient person he says, “little progress is to be made in that arena until we advance in love itself—the genuine inner readiness and longing to secure the good of others. Until we make significant progress there, our patience and kindness will be shallow and short-lived at best.”
 - b) Did you catch that? “Until we advance in love itself...”
 - c) But how can we advance that?
 - i) By calling out to the heart of grace itself - the love of God – and then acting upon what we know in our heads and may feel in our hearts.

- ii) "...Taking love itself — God's kind of love — into the depths of our being through spiritual formation will, by contrast, enable us to act lovingly to an extent that will be surprising even to ourselves, at first. And this love will then become a constant source of joy and refreshment to ourselves and others." [Pause]

6) Lord, may it be so... Let us pray...

INVITATION TO RESPOND & PRAYER (1.5 minutes):

- 1) Heavenly Father...
- 2) I am reminded right now of what Jesus not only prayed for His disciples in John 17 but what He commanded them earlier in John 15:
 - a) *⁹ As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. ¹⁰ If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. ¹¹ These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full. ¹² "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. [John 15:9-12]*
- 3) As we head into the celebration of The Lord's Supper would you help us to:
 - a) Listen to the words of Jesus to His followers to "prioritize love".
 - b) Yield to the prompting of the Holy Spirit when "doing love" seems hard.
 - c) Honor you, our Father, everytime we treat another brother or sister with Your kind of love.
- 4) We humbly ask this in the precious name of Jesus –
 - a) the One who laid down His life for another.
 - b) Amen and Amen...