

Strength Through The Storms #14

What the World Needs Now

1 Corinthians 13

April 28, 2024

How would you characterize the condition of our world? I guess to some degree it would depend on whether you are an optimist or a pessimist. It would depend to some extent on your knowledge of the truth – which is becoming harder to discern because the vast majority of news to be more focused on bias rather than the facts of the truth.

If you were to ask 10 random people what they thought the greatest need the world has, what do you suppose they would say? As Christians, our answer would be Jesus, but for everybody else we might find a different response. Many would probably say peace. Some may say to defeat poverty. Some may say unity. What would you say – other than Jesus?

It was April of 1965 that Jackie DeShannon recorded the song written by Burt Bacharach and Hal David. Many of you would be familiar with the song that was selected by the U.S. Congress for inclusion in the Library of Congress.

**What the world needs now
Is love, sweet love
It's the only thing that there's
Just too little of.**

**What the world needs now
Is love, sweet love
No, not just for some
But for everyone.**

As we continue our messages through 1 Corinthians, Paul has just gone into some detail about spiritual gifts. He identified many, wrote of their importance, and the goal of building up the body of Christ. Chapter 13 is perhaps the most famous chapter in 1 Corinthians known as

the “**Love Chapter.**” We’re going to see what God has to say about this extremely important subject. The title of the message is: **WHAT THE WORLD NEEDS NOW.**

Read 1 Cor. 13.1-3

Only two main points to today’s message but they are spiritual food that will nourish our souls. First is...

I. THE CONDITIONS

1. We could accurately refer to this as the “**if**” passage. 5 times in 3 verses we see that little word “**if.**”
2. Before we look at the “**ifs**” it is important to understand the context. The spiritual gifts text which we introduced but did not consider most of, was not only about identifying spiritual gifts but was a correction to the church who was misusing

those gifts for personal benefit, rather than benefit of the whole body as God intended.

3. The expression of spiritual gifts should include the motivation of love.
4. We also need a refresher course on the **Greek words used for love.**

“Eros” is passionate, self-pleasing love. It is where the word “erotic” comes from. This Greek word is not found in the New Testament.

**“Philia” refers to affection and closeness found in friendships.
“Philadelphia” known as the city of brotherly love comes from this word.**

“Agape” is love that is selfless and seeks the highest good for another, even at the price of a person’s comfort or convenience. This describes God’s

love. It is “agape” love that is the subject of the passage we just read. (KJV translates agape as “charity.”)

5. Now, back to those “ifs” of the first three verses.
6. Keep in mind that each of the things mentioned are impossible. Paul is writing in hyperbole.

Webster – Hyperbole – “extravagant exaggeration” (“such as is “mile high ice cream cone.”)

7. The first hyperbolic statement is in regard to “**speaking with the tongues of men and angels**” – something nobody can do.
8. “**Tongues of men**” refers to all the languages of the earth and is translated as such in the NLT.

NLT: “If I could speak all the languages of earth...”

9. According to the World Atlas, there are **7,151** languages. If a person could speak all of those, it would truly be amazing, but nobody can.
10. **“Tongues of angels”** or language of angels sometimes is equated to the gift of speaking in tongues. Most Bible scholars disagree, and say it refers to the language of heaven which nobody knows.
11. It would be incredible if somebody knew and could speak heavenly language or all 7,151 languages – but even if they could, it would be useless. It would be like a noisy gong or clashing cymbal. – Remember that illustration? For those of you who missed it, let me illustrate...

12. In verse 2 he mentions the spiritual gift of “**prophecy**” which refers to “**forth telling**” or proclaiming God’s Word so people can understand it. In chapter 14, “**prophecy**” is referred to as the greatest spiritual gift. Paul himself was a prophet. (**Acts 13.1**) The greatest prophet in the world is worthless without love – including the apostle and prophet Paul.
13. Wouldn’t it be great IF you could know **all** the mysteries and have **all** the knowledge, and **all** the faith to move mountains?
Without agape, it would amount to nothing.
14. Can you imagine anybody “**giving ALL their possessions to feed the poor**”? There have been many sacrificial givers who suffered themselves in order to give to the poor, but it was to no avail without agape.

Prelude to Illustration:

Charles Richard Hillis (1913–2005) was an American Protestant Christian missionary to China.

At the age of thirteen in 1926, Dick attended evangelistic meetings at the little Methodist church in town, where his mother served as chairman of the church's missionary committee. It was during these meetings where Dr. George Bennard, (the author of the gospel hymn The Old Rugged Cross) was the guest speaker, that young Dick Hillis was called to go to China as a missionary. Hillis and his family spent most of World War II in the United States, but returned to China after the war, only to face further conflict between the Chinese Communists and the Chinese Nationalist Party.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dick_Hillis

He wrote a book “**Love is a Costly Thing**” where he described this experience.

Love is a Costly Thing

She was lying on the ground. In her arms she held a tiny baby girl. As I put a cooked sweet potato into her outstretched hand, I wondered if she would live until morning. Her strength was almost gone, but her tired eyes acknowledged my gift. The sweet potato could help so little -- but it was all I had.

Taking a bite she chewed it carefully. Then, placing her mouth over her baby's mouth, she forced the soft warm food into the tiny throat. Although the mother was starving, she used the entire potato to keep her baby alive. Exhausted from her effort,

she dropped her head on the ground and closed her eyes. In a few minutes the baby was asleep. I later learned that during the night the mother's heart stopped, but her little girl lived.

Love is a costly thing. God in His love for us (and for a lost world) "spared not His own Son" to tell the world of His love. Love is costly, but we must tell the world at any cost. Such love is costly. It costs parents and sons and daughters. It costs the missionary life itself. In his love for Christ the missionary often must give up all to make the Savior known. If you will let your love for Christ, cost you something, the great advance will be made together.

Remember, love is a costly thing. Do you love enough?

Dick Hills, Love is a Costly Thing

15. What about a martyr who gives his life – to be burned for the cause of Christ? It is totally of no value apart from agape.
16. What do you sacrifice for Christ? Most people don't tithe... 10% is too much to give to God. Your bank account is a reflection of your true priorities. The point is that if you gave 100% it is really of no value apart from agape.
17. WHAT THE WORLD NEEDS NOW IS AGAPE! Those are just some of the CONDITIONS where real love should be expressed. But there is a second point to this message...

II. THE CHARACTERISTICS

1. What does real agape look like?

Read 1 Cor. 13.4-7

2. Each one of those verses is certainly worthy of its own sermon, which would make a good sermon, but we will consider them all this morning. (**That's why there are only 2 major points to this message – which in reality may have 15!**)
3. These are really “**fact packed sentences!**” What does “**patience**” look like in love? Patience may be missing in eros, or Philo, but it cannot be missing in real agape.
4. In each of the cases, Paul mentions there is a positive aspect and a negative consequence.
5. Since we know why this letter was written, it is safe to say that he was correcting the Corinthians who were guilty of the negative consequences that were lacking in agape love.
6. What does patient agape look like? It looks like my dad who sacrificially took care of

my mother with Alzheimer's. It is a sacrificial love that doesn't give up or get bent out of shape... (very often!)

7. Agape is "**kind.**" How would you describe "**kindness.**" Would it include the idea of a pleasant attitude? **The Greek word means "to show oneself useful, to act benevolently."**
8. Have you ever had a best friend whose feelings were mutual, only for their attention to be drawn away to somebody else? Agape is "**not jealous.**"
9. Jealousy has caused more harm than we probably can imagine. Eve was jealous of God, and her pride became the target of Satan. It was the jealousy of Cain for Abel that led to the first murder.

What a catastrophe!

Irish novelist and playwright Samuel Beckett received great recognition for his work--but not everyone savored his accomplishments. Beckett's marriage, in fact, was soured by his wife's jealousy of his growing fame and success as a writer. One day in 1969 his wife Suzanne answered the telephone, listened for a moment, spoke briefly, and hung up. She then turned to Beckett and with a stricken look whispered, "What a catastrophe!" Was it a devastating personal tragedy? No, she had just learned that Beckett had been awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature!

Today in the Word, February 1991, p. 15.

10. Agape does not brag and is not arrogant. Bragging is the other side of jealousy. Jealousy wants what somebody else has, bragging makes others jealous of what you have. Arrogance is an attitude.

11. Remember that a major part of agape is selflessness. That is the focus of verse 5. Notice the different translations:

1 Cor. 13.5

NASU: “...does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered...”

KJV: “Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil.”

NIV: “It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.”

NLT: “...or rude. It does not demand its own way. It is not irritable, and it keeps no record of being wronged.”

12. Agape does not hold a grudge. Agape takes no delight in evil but rejoices in truth. To delight in evil is to justify unrighteousness. Remember the Corinthians were guilty of these negative things.
13. The “**truth**” that agape “**rejoices in**” is God’s truth – which the world seeks to scoff at.
14. Unrighteousness is the opposite of God’s truth.
15. Sometimes standing on the Word of God’s truth may seem unloving. This passage does NOT teach that we are to love everything and everybody. We are to love as God loves which sometimes may come across as unloving.

16. Proclaiming the truth of sound doctrine may be the most loving thing a person can do, especially when it confronts unrighteous behavior.
17. It is not unloving to confront sin with God's truth – quite the opposite, it is a great expression of real love.

Truth and Perspective

I want to share with you the true story of Dr. Bernard Nathanson. Dr. Bernard Nathanson was a leading abortion doctor in the United States in the 1970's. He had actually performed an abortion on a woman he had gotten pregnant during this time. This physician had campaigned vigorously for the legalization of abortion and he states that he had performed over 75,000 abortions himself.

But something changed Dr. Nathanson's point of view, the introduction of the ultrasound in 1976. This device literally opened a window on fetal development. The first time Dr. Nathanson saw an ultrasound in action, he was convicted. He could see a throbbing heart and all four chambers of the heart pumping blood. He said that his mind had dropped the word fetus in favor of the word baby. Suddenly, everything he had been learning about the child in the womb since his entry into medicine snapped into focus. He had known what took place in the womb, but seeing it for the first time changed everything. Dr. Nathanson, the leading abortion doctor in America, became convinced that human life existed within the womb from the onset of pregnancy.

In an article he wrote for the New England Journal of Medicine he wrote, "in abortion, we are taking life." After deciding abortion that abortion was murder, he switched camps and began to campaign for a reversal of Roe vs. Wade.

One of the most convincing things that Dr. Nathanson did was to utilize an ultrasound to witness an abortion. He asked a colleague who was performing several abortions a day to put an ultrasound device on a few of his patients and, with their permission, taped the procedure. What they found was that the fetus seemed to feel pain and tried to get away from the suction device that the physician was using.

Sermoncentral.com

18. WHAT THE WOULD NEEDS NOW is God's truth proclaimed in love which often may be perceived as unloving, because it is often

confrontational. Was Jesus unloving when He cleansed the temple?

19. The essence of verse 7 is that agape never gives up. Sometimes love has to “**give over**” but it never gives up.

20. The first part of **verse 8** says it all:

“Love never fails...”

Conclusion

When you read and stud the passage we have just considered, you really should get a clearer picture of Jesus. Remember the one-word definition of God?

1 John 4.8 “...God is love.”

1 John 4.16 “...God is love.”

And sometimes real love is tough.

How much does God love you?

Romans 5.8 But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

Have you responded to God's love?

Prayer