

Sermon Sunday 20th November 2017

We are called to be loving

Corinthians 13

**"And now I will show you the most excellent way.**

**If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge and if I have a faith that can move mountains but have not love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.**

**Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoiced with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.**

**Love never fails. But where there are prophecies they will cease; where there are tongues they will be stilled; where there is knowledge it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophecy in part but when perfection comes the imperfect disappears. When I was a child I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man I put childish ways behind me. Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.**

**And now these three remain faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love."**

**I asked John if I could speak on this chapter as over the years it has been an integral part of my Christian walk. My God mother gave me a Bible when I was christened as a young child and in the front of it she wrote verses 4-7. I looked at them over the years from time to time and always found comfort in them.**

**I was privileged as a young Christian to be the confident of a much older friend who was dying of cancer and one day he asked me what Christianity meant to me and what my favourite portion of Scripture was and why. Without hesitation I was able to recite 1 Cor. 13 to him ( I couldn't do it now - it was a Holy Spirit moment) and told him it was how I saw my Christian life should be and what I aspired to in my life. I don't know if it helped him but he seemed satisfied.**

**When I came back to the Lord after a 19 year absence this passage was the one that first came to mind and I went and dug out that old, frayed Bible my God mother gave me and read it in there. It was the start of my return to a true relationship with God. So when the opportunity to speak on it came I didn't want to let it pass by.**

**These verses are amongst the most well known in the Bible and are some of the most frequently used at weddings or similar occasions where there is a love theme. But here in 1 Corinthians we do not find them as part of a wedding ceremony or even a passage about marriage. They are in the middle of a letter written by Paul to the most divided, immoral and spiritually arrogant church in the New Testament. They are also written about love within the church - between brothers and sisters in Christ.**

In John 13: 34-35 on the night Jesus was betrayed and arrested we read this

**" A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. BY THIS all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another"**

Jesus not only commanded his disciples to love one another, He said that love would be THE identifying mark of discipleship and a witness to the world. There are several words for love in Greek. We have heard them defined from this pulpit many times. The main two are Philos which is a term for family affection or friendship or Agape which is defined as an other centred concern expressed at great cost. It is this term Agape that Paul uses here - the term that Jesus showed when he made the ultimate sacrifice in Agape love by dying on the cross for our sins.

The assembly of disciples who confess Jesus Christ as their LORD and MASTER, the church, us you and me, is supposed to be the place where this AGAPE love is most clearly seen. However, it is completely absent from Corinth. They have every kind of gift imaginable - but they do not have Christ-like AGAPE love and therefore they are not truly being led by the Spirit.

Agape love is different from all other kinds. Friendship, family or even sexual love is naturally drawn out of us by another person. That kind is easy because we like the person, we're related to them or we are attracted to them -we are compelled to love. AGAPE love is different. It is not drawn out by anything loveable in the person, but because love has been set on us by Christ.

The brokenness in Corinth is not caused by a lack of zeal, or truth, or volunteers, or giving; it is caused by a lack of love for people who are different than me. Whenever there is division or a lack of joy in our marriages, our families or our churches we often look to more tangible causes. In truth we can perform many tasks required of relationship but do so in a way that is loveless. Relative to the church you can, on the surface, have an appearance of health, growth and success but be empty and weak if there is no love.

Paul is very direct here. He is basically saying that emotionally charged services, spiritual experiences, great preaching, mountain moving faith and even sacrificial giving are not necessarily proof that people are obeying God. Paul says that you can do all these things without love. We can have and do all of these things BUT absolutely nothing is gained if the motive for such sacrifice is pride or self - display. A big church, a young church, a popular church, a growing church, a gifted church is utterly nothing without AGAPE love. No matter how much you think you're right, if you don't have love you're wrong.

In verses 4-6 God's definition of love tests all other definitions the world might provide but more importantly it tests our own. Notice Paul doesn't say this is how love "ought to be" he says this is how love is or is not. Paul here is not only chastising the Corinthians but challenging their conversions because true love comes from God and is a defining characteristic of a true Christian through faith in Jesus Christ. 1 John 4: 7-12 tells us;

**" Beloved, let us love one another for love is from God and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love (in this AGAPE way) does not know God because God is love. In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent His only Son into the world so that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that He**

**loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved if God so loved us we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and His love is perfected in us. God is love."**

**Hebrews tells us " God has revealed himself most clearly through Jesus Christ"**

This 14 characteristic definition in Corinthians then is a description of how Jesus has loved us and those who know Christ's love, love like Him because the Spirit of the God who is love abides in us. In other words evidence of the Spirit of God in us begins with love.

**1 John 4: 13-15 tells us:**

**"By this we know that we abide in Him and He in us because He has given us of His Spirit. And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent His Son to be the Saviour of the World. Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of god, God abides in him and he in God."**

There is not time this morning to look at the 14 attributes of love in detail but if you look on the website there is a fuller description of them there.

Paul ends his address on love by pointing them to the future: Paul puts everything into perspective reminding the Corinthians that one day spiritual gifts will pass away and become useless. When Jesus returns there will be no need for any of the spiritual gifts. The gifts are given to help us to live as God's people now, as well as draw others into God's family. But even now they are insufficient, incomplete. they are designed by God to be temporary. That which is not important has become TOO important to the Corinthian church. They have begun to worship imperfect gifts rather than the perfect gift Giver.

The best songs, the greatest sermons, the most faithful service will only ever give us a partial reflection of God. We will not fully comprehend God in this life, and though we see God in Jesus Christ we will never fully grasp this revelation of Himself. We see in a mirror dimly. We understand and so act like spiritual children all our lives. But when Jesus returns we will grow up to full maturity in the twinkling of an eye and see all.

A pursuit of love, not spiritual gifts will lead us to greater maturity because it is the only thing that we will take with us into eternity. Faith and hope are important now but in eternity faith and hope will not be necessary. All of God's promises will have been fulfilled. I, you will not have to listen to sermons or read books, or even study God's word to build my/your faith - We will know fully and be fully known. And we will no longer have to hope for His return, hope to be free from sin, hope to endure suffering or even hope for eternal life because we will have it. Hope will have been realised.

But love will never end! God's love for us will never stop. god's love for us will continue into eternity. And more than that, our love for one another will continue. All spiritual gifts will pass away and become meaningless in the eternal kingdom - they will have done their job to build us into a temple for God. As God dwells with us in love, our relationships will have meaning forever. We will be in loving relationship into eternity and we will, at that time, love one another perfectly.

**How do we become loving?**

**What if I don't have loving? What if I'm failing to love as I ought? How do I change?**

**There is only one thing that can cause you to be loving starting now, or lead you to be more loving tomorrow than you are today - the gospel.**

**2 Cor. 5 14-15 says this:**

**""For the love of Christ controls us because we have concluded this: that One has died for all, therefore all have died; and He died for all that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for Him who for their sake died and was raised."**

**Our energies should not be spent on reforming our behaviour to make it more loving. We should seek to remember the love of Christ as seen on the cross. That truth on the forefront of our minds is what will make us more loving.**

**AMEN**

## Love Attributes

**Love is patient:** Genuine love is patient with people. This kind of love listens, observes and endures injury without retaliation. This kind of love is slow to speak, exercises restraint and waits for people who are not ready to move, understand or listen. This kind of love is not quick to rebuke a wrong done but holds back wrath and like Jesus trusts God for the right moment to encourage or admonish.

**Love is kind:** Genuine love is not only passively patient. It is actively empathetic. Kindness is more than affection or warmth - it is entering into another's suffering in order to help them with their burdens. Loving- kindness is the tenderness toward others that Christ showed me, an ugly hostile rebellious sinner. To those who don't like me, I give mercy. To those who I don't like, I give grace. true kindness moves you beyond sentiment to action and, if it is truly Christ like, it costs us something.

**Love does not envy:** In Jesus I have everything I truly want and exactly what I need. His love removes all jealousy and helps me rejoice with what others have, great or small. true love removes all rivalry, all competition and all comparisons and makes us grateful for one another as part of one family. Like Jesus who was equal with God, true love finds joy becoming less so others can be more.

**Love does not boast:** Love does not boast about what it has done. IT is unloving to be a talkative windbag who needs to call attention to oneself or otherwise promote themselves. A loving person is humble and makes every effort to avoid self praise {Prov 27:2} This is because true love is always far more impressed with its own unworthiness than its own excellence. Like Jesus, we boast in God and Him alone.

**Love is not arrogant:** Love does not view itself as superior to others. Love is more than an obligation, action or duty - it is a heart attitude toward people. Love is not puffed up with pride over who they are, what they know or what they have done. Love does not care about building their resume in order to set themselves above others. Like Jesus they care only for building up the church.

**Love is not rude:** Love always speaks with grace and acts with purity. There is a kind of Christian who takes delight in being blunt or brutally honest. true love considers how their tones, actions and words will impact another. More than that, love does not act indecently but, like Jesus, considers whether every action will bring more, or less, glory to god. Love does not insist on its own way: true love remembers its duties more than its rights. There are two kinds of people - those who insist on their own rights or entitlements and those who always remember their responsibilities; those who are always thinking about what is owed them and those who think about what they owe others. Like Jesus, love always seeks the advantage of others.

**Love is not irritable:** Love does not have a short temper with those who disobey, disrupt or disappoint. true love never becomes exasperated with sinful people, young and old. Perpetual irritation with other's sins is a denial of how your sin irritated God. Though sin makes us rightfully angry, the love of Christ drives us towards the cross where God satisfied His anger with us.

**Love is not resentful:** Love does not store up a record of wrongs. Love is not bitter maintaining a ledger of wrongs that cannot be forgotten. True love forgives and also works to forget, just as Jesus forgave and buried our sin. Like Jesus, true love willingly "suffers wrong" and trusts God will judge.

**Love does not rejoice in wrong doing but rejoices with the truth:** Love finds no pleasure in injustice or the misfortunes of others. Instead love rejoices in truth even if it results in my disadvantage. There are times when we are tempted to hide truth. Jesus said the truth sets us free. True love has no wish to veil truth. It wants to know and make known the truth - even if it costs us the love of the world.

**Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things and endures all things:** The last statement reads like one poetic stanza. This final verse summarizes the very nature of Christ's relationship with us and therefore the model of our relationship with others. We bear all things; meaning true love endures every insult or injury. We believe all things. We bear every pain from people because we believe and trust in God's loving promises. We believe that God is who He says He is, did what He said He did and will do what He promises to do. We also hope all things. Because we believe in the power of God's love we never see anyone or any situation as hopeless. We know that there is more to this life but we also know that there is more to each person. We believe and hope the best for them. Finally we also endure all things. true love wins. In Christ's crucifixion we see that love does endure. But in his resurrection we see that all suffering has a purpose and that in the end love always triumphs.

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