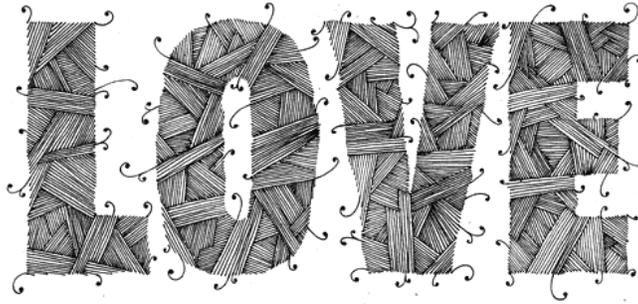


Attributes of Agape, Part 1



Preached by: Matthew S. Black

Text: 1 Corinthians 13¹

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Series: Love One Another

Introduction: Open your Bible to John 13:35 and 1 Corinthians 13. We begin a series that I hope will be transformational in our church entitled "Love One Another". Today's message is entitled: "The Attributes of Agape Love".

The defining evidence of a Christian – the mark that sets us apart as followers of Christ – what is it? Is it our intellectual greatness? Is it our spiritual gifts? Is it our kindly attitude? Is it our ability to articulate eloquent morality? None of these things define the Christian. The one thing that sets us apart is our LOVE.

John 13:35, "By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

Love we shall see, by definition, is self-sacrifice. It is defined by both John 3:16 and 1 John 3:16.

The essence of love is self-sacrifice

- **John 3:16,** "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son..."
- **1 John 3:16,** "By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers."

We can know love by laying down our lives for Christ's Church. If we are to be like Christ, we must lay down our lives for His Bride as He did. We must give our lives away for His people. Look around you. This is your family. We are called to bleed for this body of believers. The essence of love is self-sacrifice. God so loved the world – He loved the world in such a defining, amazing, and overwhelming way – that He expressed that love in sacrifice – the sacrifice of His only begotten Son.

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture is from the *English Standard Version* of the Bible.

Love—is the defining mark of a Christ follower! It is the mark that sets us apart and identifies us as Christ's people. Francis Schaeffer called the love of Christians for each other the ultimate answer or the "final apologetic" we can give to the world. If you don't have it, your life is not Christ like and it amounts to nothing!

Love is not an option:

- Husbands are to love their wives.
- Wives are to love their husbands.
- Believers are to love God.
- Believers are to love their enemies.
- Believers are to love their neighbors.
- Believers are to love one another.

Context

The Corinthian church was an example of a group of everything who were rich, talented, intelligent, and spiritually gifted, but they lacked the most important thing: love! You can be a spiritual giant and incredibly gifted, but if you lack love, Paul says you are a zero.

Before Paul gives us what this self-sacrifice, this LOVE looks like, He tells us that no matter what you have, if you don't have love, you are nothing! Listen to Paul speak to these extremely gifted people.

1 Corinthians 13:1-3, "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, but have not love, I gain nothing."

Three observations:

1. You need love for **communication**. If you do not have love, your **words** will sound like noise to people, and they will not listen to you.

I Cor. 13:1, "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. You need love for **reputation**. All your **Bible knowledge and faith** are vain if you do not have love. You as a person amount to "nothing" without love. If you want to impact the world, you need to know how to love.

I Cor. 13:2, "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. You need love for the right **motivation**. All your **sacrifice** is vain if you do not have love. What are you trying to gain? If you are not sacrificing your life for the good of another, you gain nothing.

I Cor. 13:3, "If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing."

You can give yourself as a martyr for a cause, but if in your heart you do it not for love and true sacrifice of another person with no expectation of reward, you gain nothing. You may be praised by men and adored on earth, but you gain nothing with God or in His kingdom.

Love is the climax of everything. It is the ultimate expression of Christ-likeness and mature sanctification. Yet, it is sad that love as important as it is, it is very frequently *missing* from God's own people – Christ's own church.

So how we define love? We must look to Christ. **1 John 4:19**, "We love because he first loved us." If love means that I am like Christ, then I'd better look deep at the figure so that I can replicate it in my life.

We are to gaze at Christ and be transformed into His image. We see Christ in 1 Corinthians 13. Let's see the first attribute of agape love.

It is interesting that each characteristic or description is given in verb form. The Bible doesn't say "love feels like this." The Bible says love **chooses** to think this way and act this way.

Attribute 1: Love is patient (putting up with others)

1 Cor. 13:4, "Love is patient".

Definition

The Greek word translated "patient" means "long-tempered" and is the exact opposite of our expression "short-fused." **Patience is the ability to control and restrain sinful anger or frustration.** It is learning self-restraint in all kinds of difficult situations, especially with people. The word is used almost exclusively of being patient with people as opposed to circumstances or things. A lack of patience will turn your home into a war zone. Patience refuses to give in to short wick of heated emotions.

Observation

I love that Paul's description of love begins with patience! It tells us that if you are going to get close to people, you are going to get hurt! You are going to see their inconsistencies. There will be massive temptation to be exasperated and frustrated and to simply want to give up! You can't. If you don't love you are nothing. You've got to put up with people at times. You patiently wait for God to work in them.

Job's Patience

Remember Job's *patience*. James tell us in **James 5:11**, "Behold, we consider those blessed who remained steadfast [patient]. You have heard of the steadfastness [patience] of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful." *Patience always waits for a godly outcome.* Job's friends were not very nice to Job. They accused him of sin. He had just lost his kids and his health and they said it was his own fault. But Job remained patient with people and trusting in God. Though Job could have become bitter about His situation, He never lost sight of God's goodness and justice. God is good and He is just. He will always do us right in every situation. When you are wronged, or when you feel frustrated and exasperated with someone, you need to be patient with them and steadfast in trusting God.

Objection

"But what if someone sins against me? Shouldn't I retaliate". There is not retaliation in love. God is the one who is to give vengeance. Paul tells us in **Romans 12:19**, "Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord'". *Love is patient.* Consider Christ as **1 Peter 2:23** tells us that, "when he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly."

Looking to Christ

Consider how patiently Christ waited on you until He brought you to Himself. He patiently called you. All day long He stretched His arms out to you. But you rebuffed and recoiled from Him. He could have banished you with your first sin, just as He did the fallen angels. He patiently waited on you. He loved you with an everlasting love. He was willing to wait.

All those years we reviled Him. We pushed Him away. We mocked Him. Every time we sinned – we scorned Him – we ignored Him. Yet look at how patient He was. It was our sins that nailed Him to the cross.

- **Isaiah 53:7**, "He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth."
- When Christ was crucified, He cried out, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (**Luke 23:34**). Look at Christ the Lamb – He opened not His mouth!
- **1 Peter 2:23**, "When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly."

Application

The next time you are wronged, remember Christ. Be like a lamb! When you are oppressed and afflicted, be like Christ! Be like Christ, and give your frustration and hurt to Christ. Know Him in the "fellowship of His suffering" – long suffering. That's what love is! It's patient. It's got a loooooong fuse!

Transition: 1 Corinthians 13:13 says; "The greatest of these [all attributes, characteristics, and spiritual gifts that can define you...] is love." In **1 Peter 4:8** we read, "Above all, keep loving one another earnestly". In **Romans 13:10**, we read that "Love is the fulfilling of the whole law." **Love is important.**

We found first that love is patient. It puts up with the frustrating failings of others. It tolerates others and patiently waits on God.

Attribute 2: Love is kind (giving to others)

1 Cor. 13:4, "Love is...kind".

The word "kind" means useful. It means to lift the burden of another, to furnish what is needed. Kindness always puts others needs before one's own. It is to be useful to others, hence good-natured, good, gentle. It is showing active goodwill to others. **Kindness is the sympathetic sweetness of temper which puts others at their ease, and shrinks from causing pain.**² Kindness actively looks for ways to positively contribute to another's life.

Biblical love takes an ambitious approach to giving God what he deserves and sacrificing to give others what is needed. Do you love in useful ways? This kind of love looks for ways to be constructive, such as...

- lending a helping hand
 - a kind note or call
 - a word of encouragement
 - giving of your time, etc.
- This requires thought and involvement in the lives of others to understand what the needs are so you can do the useful or constructive thing.
 - Love requires a **servant's heart!**

How do you go about detecting needs in the lives of others?

- A. **This is central to the nature of Christ.** **Matthew 11:30**, "For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." Translated here as "easy." This is the same word translated "kind" in 1 Corinthians 13. The yoke or harness of Christ is easy; it is kind because Christ does all the work.

² William Barclay, *The Letters to the Corinthians* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1956), 256.

B. **This is central to the nature of God.** Titus 3:4-5, "But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, 5 he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit".

Eph 2:6-7, God has "raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, 7 so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus."

Translated here as "kindness" Again, the same word translated "kind" in 11 Corinthians 13.

How could you be kind to:

- A Family struggling financially
- A Friend
- A mom with young children
- A Business associate
- Your boss, employee
- Your parent, teacher, child
- A Church member who looks to be discouraged

Kindness actively looks for ways to positively contribute to another's life. How might this be lovingly demonstrated in one's home?

Applications

Men look out for your wife! Help her when you get home. Look around at the needs of church members. Think of others. It could be a note of encouragement. It could be lifting someone's burden. Just praying with someone after the service. It could be a kind word of appreciation to say, "you are loved, you are important to me."

Conclusion: Consider Moses who chose reproach with the people of God rather than the pleasures of sin for a season. Moses chose to suffer with Christ outside the camp and "lay down his life" for God's people. Consider David who twice could have destroyed his enemy, but instead was patient with King Saul and showed him kindness.

You will find love by looking to Christ. Learning to love begins with total surrender. It is being crucified with Christ. Only when you are crucified with Christ can you lay down your life for others!