

The Love of Christ Chapter, Part 1 (1 Corinthians 13:1-3)

Please turn in God's holy inspired and inerrant Word to 1st Corinthians and chapter 13. If you have the Bible under the seat in front of you, it's p. 623. This morning I'm introducing a new series that I'll continue tonight at our evening service after our fellowship meal. I really want to encourage you all to come tonight if humanly and logistically possible and to be with us in the series on this chapter future Sunday nights where we'll be unpacking every verse and section of this great chapter on what it calls the greatest reality in the Bible and the universe for all time. Some people think the greatest thing is hope, or others can argue the greatest thing is faith, but Henry Drummond was right to call love The Greatest Thing in the World,¹ as 1 Cor 13:13 says 'faith, hope, and love abide, these three, but the greatest of these is love.' In our time today we're going to study v. 1-3 to introduce this series on love.

If you've been around the church any number of years, or if you've been to any number of Christian weddings, these words will be familiar to you. It's the love chapter, what love is and what it isn't. v. 4-8 is especially famous: ⁴ *Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant⁵ 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.*

Very familiar words, but they can be too familiar, and many aren't familiar with the context. Some people love the words, but if we really understood the depth of them, we might not love how they show us all our lack of love, and show where we all still love sin and self too much and are hard to love. In the original context Paul wrote to bring conviction and correction to the church, and it should convict and correct us and call us to recognize how we desperately need another kind of love, Christ's. Gordon Fee wrote 'The love affair with this love chapter has allowed it to be read regularly apart from its context, which does not make it less true but causes one to miss too much.'²

This morning we're going to look at v. 1-3 of this chapter, then tonight after our fellowship meal we'll start to look at each part of v. 4-7, beginning with 'love is patient' in v. 4, and then next Sunday night Pastor Mark will bring a message on *love is kind* (next one in v. 4), then Dean, etc., through summer. Last year I did a series called Church 101 on the big sections in Acts. This will really be a series on Christian Life 101, or Love 101, looking at smaller sections and taking our time because we can't spend too much time on love, its attributes and application in our lives. Love can be a life-changing study.

I'm praying this will prove to be a pivotal study in the life of our church. I know it's of critical importance to God, as love is His greatest command. I'm really looking forward to what God has for us in this series and I really want to urge you to make coming back for these evening series a priority, as Christ puts highest priority on love. I want to encourage you not to let other things take priority, like excuses of tiredness or just tendency not to come or your traditions of TV watching, time with family, etc. Church is your family and what we'll be learning is an investment in this church family and family you live with at home. Love doesn't seek its own, but as we seek to build up others, encouraging by our presence those who will be laboring in love this summer in their preparation and preaching, and also encouraging others you interact with after evening service, there is blessing God has for you as well.

Tonight at 5:00 our fellowship meal will kick it off, not a mere potluck, it's a providential opportunity to fellowship and express biblical love. The NT church called their fellowship gatherings for that purpose 'love feasts' (Jude 12), or '*agape* meals,' same Greek noun for love in 1 Cor 13. Hebrews 10 says a primary reason church family's gather together, is to '*consider one another in order to stir up love [agape] and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the habit of some*' (v. 24-25 NKJV).

Churches need to gather together regularly corporately as a loving family to stimulate agape love that doesn't naturally happen without it, and we're not to neglect the assembly of the church. Heb 10 isn't for the sake of numbers, it's for numbness and coldness that can happen when we're not near the fire of fellowship. That passage says we're not to give up the church's meetings because we need to encourage or exhort one another, and so I'm exhorting you to consider one another and how you can stir up *agape* in fellowship. If your heart has no or little interest in that or doesn't see your need, if you're not that concerned about or rarely considering these things, come and I pray your heart will be stirred, stimulated in and by love. I sure need that at times

There's other times for less formal fellowship gatherings, next Sunday after the morning service some families bring food or grab some after the service and spend time together eating down at the picnic tables. Next Saturday we have a men's breakfast fellowship and teaching, and I know WM has times of fellowship planned you could talk to Linda Cain or WM about. Sunday nights this summer I consider our family time, more informal and we share requests and sometimes testimonies, messages of 35-40 minutes or so, just an hour-long service. My prayer is that hour affects the other 144 each week

Well, love is to be the greatest and strongest motivation of the Christian life, not Law. Jesus said the commandments to love God and neighbor sum up the Law and prophets. The Law confronts sin, it can't control or compel us, but Paul writes later to this Corinthian church *'the love of Christ compels us ... that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again'* (2 Cor 5:14-15). The love of Christ is to move and motivate us to love, not seeking our own and not living for self. I pray Christ's love moves and motivates and stimulates this love we, I need. That's where Paul's going and he starts in our text today, 1 Cor 13:1-3, with a warning that if I'm not motivated by this love, it's all nothing and so am I.

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 *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* [3 results: I'm noisy (v. 1), I'm nothing (v. 2), I get nothing (v. 3)]

3 results, 3 verses, 3 headings to introduce our study we'll continue tonight:

1. The Original Context
2. The Divine Mathematics
3. The Gospel Applied in Practice (I'll repeat those as we go)

First, we need to start with The Original Context

Drummond points out that the apostle who wrote this didn't start out loving by nature. Paul was a fundamentalist Pharisee legalist separatist from fellow Jews, a racist toward Gentiles, and vicious toward Christians he killed; 'the hand that wrote [1 Cor 13]...when we meet it first, is stained with blood.'³

The context of the original writer shows this love is from God, not natural to man, it's a supernatural love that transformed Paul, so it can transform us

Last communion Sunday I taught from 1 Cor 1 how Paul starts this letter to this church addressing how their disunity, disputes, quarrels and conflicts revealed a lack of love for and focus on Christ (even 'I'm of Christ' folks). There were factions and favorites among teachers: 'I'm of Paul,' or 'I'm of Apollos' (apparently a more gifted eloquent speaker), or 'I'm of Peter' (he's after all, one of the original apostles, and his fiery preaching in Acts saw thousands saved). Ryken likens it to 'my apostle is better than your apostle' or to saying 'my gift or ministry is more important than yours.' They may not have put those bumper stickers on their chariots...but their boasting was broadcasting that message just as clearly, and Paul writes to correct that sin.

They didn't need Facebook for self-promoting or self-focus, and we need to be careful there. But we might update the language 'if I tweet in languages of men or angels, yet without love, I'm like a noisy blog or annoying social media post.' Or using an older analogy, 'no matter how eloquent or gifted I am in speech, without love a Gong Show sound should usher me off-stage.' Or just think of whatever music you can't stand and imagine a bad version of it out of sync and amplify the instruments...that's how we are w/out love!

The Corinthian culture Paul wrote this letter to in the 1st century was similar in some ways to Sacramento or the Bay Area west of us. Entertainment and music and eloquence were big in their culture (compare 1 Cor 2). Different tribes and tongues were all in Corinth, which gives some background to v. 1 starting with 'tongues of men,' which just means '*languages* of men.' Paul says if I had power to speak native tongues of men found in Corinth but had no love for each people group, it's just noise at best or it annoys at worst. Even if I had miraculous gifts to speak in languages I never learned or even heard, without love I'd be like a computer language robot you can't shut up.

In v. 2 prophetic powers and supernatural secret knowledge and mysteries is something that was big in ancient cities like Corinth at this time. v. 1-2 isn't saying Christians are supposed to talk to angels in their angelic language, or that it's even possible to have all prophetic power and knowledge and know all mysteries and be moving mountains literally and physically by our faith. Paul is speaking hyperbolically and hypothetically: even if all that in v. 1-2 was possible by me rather than by God alone, without His love I'm nothing!

There *were* miraculous gifts given in the time of the NT apostles, prophecy and miraculous ability to speak languages (like Acts 2), etc. But even when there was new predictive prophecy and new revelation still needed before the final revelation and prophecy we looked at last time in Rev 22, nobody in history had or did all of v. 1-2 here. Paul writes this section to rebuke their loveless use and abuse of spiritual gifts they exaggerated and elevated: 'you think lesser gifts make you something but without love you're nothing'

The context of this section really starts in 12:1: *Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be uninformed* [chapters 12-14 concern spiritual gifts, that's the context chapter 13 is in the middle of. The heart of this section is love, using gifts God gave us in love for the good of others] ... ⁷ *To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit **for the common good.*** Then in v. 12-25 Paul argues every body part is vital and needs other parts.

...²⁵that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same **care for one another**. ²⁶ **If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.** ²⁷ **Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.** That's the context before 1 Cor 13—all about the body of Christ. It's about using gifts for the good of others, caring for one another in a local church. Love in the context includes weeping with those who weep and rejoicing with those who rejoice. Christians spiritually are members of the invisible global body of Christ, and it's also good to be members of a local church to make visible the body of Christ. Membership here is really a platform to let this body know you want to commit to them, care for them in love, come under the care and accountability of its elders, communicate to them and others there's no division between you and them, you're united and want to use gifts for the common good of the church body

I know some people have issues with the church, commitment or authority, some have hang-ups from churches in the past or hurts from past churches. *This church* is the most loving church I've been a part of, but every church needs to excel still more in love and not everyone feels the love every time. Probably anyone in any church can point to areas where a church has failed to love but remember you're the church and this context is love in a church. Ask not how the church can love you more but how you can love her more. Chapter 12 is all about the body of Christ, that's the context for 1 Cor 13:4:

Love is patient [you could add 'with the body of Christ'] *and kind* [think of people in the body of Christ], *love does not envy* [think of gifts of others in church, or churches better in an area. Love doesn't] *boast; it is not arrogant* [think I'm better than others in church. In v. 5 love for churchgoers is not] *rude. It does not insist on its own way* [in church meetings or with church leaders]; *it is not irritable* [think with things at church] *or resentful* [think of things you're tempted to resent about ministry decisions or just relationship issues you have]; ⁶ *it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth* [context with the church]. ⁷ *Love bears all things* [in church], *believes all things* [about her], *hopes all things* [for her], *endures all things* [w/ her]

There's some overlap here with the fruit of the spirit: *love, joy* (rejoicing in v. 6), *peace* (implication of inner peace if someone doesn't envy), *patience* (1st on list in v. 4), *kindness* (next on list in v. 4), etc. The problem is some in Corinth seemed to think the gifts of the Spirit were more important than the fruit of the Spirit. Paul lists miraculous gifts in 12:28-30. ³¹ *But earnestly desire the higher gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way.*

The context is the highest, greatest, best, most excellent of all is love, 13:13. Then he repeats gifts are to build up others in love in 14:5-6, v. 12, 26, etc. Miraculous abilities in languages you don't know aren't for your self-benefit as a private prayer language, Paul says true gifts used truly are to benefit the gathered church, to edify those who know the language and to interpret it so those who don't know it can understand, otherwise it's foreign to believers (14:11) and unbelievers in the chaos think you're out of your minds (v. 23). Paul says in v. 19 in the church better to speak 5 edifying instructing words in a language all understand than 10,000 words in a tongue not understood. In 13:8-13 miraculous gifts were temporary, love is permanent, preeminent.

Paul begins chapter 13 probably where the Corinthians put most emphasis, on speaking gifts, but in the overall context the point is it's no good if you're great at speaking to each other on Sunday if you're suing each other during the week (chapter 6). That earlier chapter fills out the picture: people talking in the courtyards after church were then taking fellow churchgoers to court! A watching world saw a hypocritical church not loving it up, lawyering up! Their disputes in chapter 1, divisions in chapter 3, divorcing in chapter 7, disregard in chapters 8-10 of weaker brothers or convictions in others, all of it was loveless and made their speech gifts empty swelling words of nothing

This is the church context Paul wrote the love chapter to in the 50s AD. Phil Ryken says the original point and purpose of 1 Cor 13 'was not trying to give people something nice to read at weddings. After all, the love he writes about here is not *eros* (the romantic love of desire), but *agape* (the selfless love of brothers and sisters in Christ) ... the apostle was trying desperately to show a church full of self-centered Christians that there is a better way to live—not just on your wedding day but every day for the rest of your life. The Love Chapter is not for lovers, primarily, but for all the loveless people in the church who think that their way of talking about God, or worshipping God, or serving God, or giving to God is better than everyone else's.'⁴

That's the original context. Now notice 2ndly: The Divine Mathematics
That phrase comes from D.A. Carson. I never loved math, though I love you who do love math despite that fact. But I know enough of the math that was useful to life before the complicated classes and concepts few people use, it doesn't take a rocket scientist to know what five minus one equals. Probably every 1st grader and up here can tell me, it's still the same in common core. Kids what does $5-1=?$ ___ In Paul's 'new math,' though, $5-1=0$. D.A. Carson says in 1 Cor 13:1-3 by 'divine mathematics...five minus one equals zero.'⁵

If you're not sure how that adds up, it goes like this: the first one in v. 1 is *all languages*, then add to that a 2nd in v. 2: *all knowledge*. Then add a 3rd from v. 3 Paul calls *all faith*. Then v. 3 adds giving *all possessions*, that's 4, then I'll call the last one *all sacrifice* (giving it all to die as a martyr, burned at the stake). That's five if you add it up, but if all five are minus one thing, if you subtract love from the equation, you gain nothing. The net result is 0. The end of v. 2 is nothing, and the end of v. 3 is nothing. Not just a negative outcome, or 1 less than best, take out love, you negate the whole equation! You can sum up all those things and more, but minus love, it's a spiritual 0. The first subtracting one, minus love was zero, $2-1=0$, $3-1=0$, $4-1=0$, $5-1=0$.

Now if you have a pen and paper I want you to do a little exercise, kids, too. If you don't have handy, try and do it in your mind. Put down five zeros in a row: 00000 - what does that equal? What if we put five more or a hundred more zeros? The net total is still 0. Now put a 1 to the left of the 5 zeros and what does that make, kids? You put a 1 before 5 zeros and it equals 100,000

Here's the point of divine mathematics: without that one, it's all zeros. Love in the equation before the rest multiplies the rest, but when that 1 is missing, there's no value, it's nothing but zero spiritually. I can multiply the equation by many more things we might add without love and any number times $0=0$

Jerry Bridges writes how a positive number in front of others immediately gives them value: 'This is the way it is with our gifts and faith and zeal. They are zeros on the page. Without love, they count for nothing. But put love in front of them and immediately they have value. And just as the number two gives more value to a row of zeros than the number one does, so more and more love can add exponentially greater value to our gifts.'⁶

To illustrate *all languages* in v. 1 I think of the story of the missionary who walked a long way to try and minister to another tribe and tongue. He didn't make a lot of progress by his verbal abilities as the story goes, the villagers mocked him and ignored him, but as he laid down under a tree exhausted to rest, some noticed the bottom of his feet and realized how far he must have walked to come to them and how he'd sacrificed his very flesh. Sensing how much he loved them, when he awoke he found many ready now to hear him

In v. 1 the word for *all* mysteries and *all* knowledge is emphatic in Greek to emphasize a literal know-it-all. They've got all mysteries solved, all minutia of end times mastered, prophetic experts are pathetic if they express no love

In other subjects some can be knowledge Nazis, or the God's-truth-Gestapo. Sadly some committed to the doctrines of grace don't communicate grace. A church in Ephesus knew good vs. bad theology but lost its 1st love (Rev 2). In any secondary area of theology you can love your point more than people but they won't care how much you know till they know how much you care.

When v. 2 mentions *all faith*, Alexander Strauch illustrates it by Word-Faith teachers 'on television [who] claim to do the impossible by faith, but they talk more about money, success, and themselves than about the people they supposedly help...I recall a radio preacher who spoke often of the marvelous things God was doing through his broadcasts and how God miraculously provided funds without his begging for money (which can be a subtle way of begging for money). But those who knew the man personally and worked for him saw things differently. They saw a man who was obsessed with money and public image. They saw his gift of faith being used to guarantee his own financial security. They saw a man who didn't care much at all for people but who cared a lot about himself.'⁷ Loveless faith counts for nothing but Gal 5:6: *the only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.*

If I preach with a golden tongue like Chrysostom, or Spurgeon as a herald of heaven, if have the mind of Jonathan Edwards, faith of George Muller, courage of martyrs, charity of Mother Theresa, if my gifts aren't based on gospel love by God's grace and for His glory, there's zero spiritual reward. In v. 3 *all charity* and *all sacrifice* can even be done without understanding God's love rightly and without being motivated by His love toward others. Humanitarian giving if not by genuine love of God doesn't count eternally.

'Amy Carmichael, who rescued abused children and provided a home for them...recognized the deadly potential of loss of love. She laid down guidelines for the Sisters...who worked together with her in the orphanage:

Unlove is deadly. It is a cancer. It may kill slowly but it always kills in the end. Let us fear it, fear to give room to it as we should fear to nurse a cobra [Amy was in India]. It is deadlier than any cobra. And just as one minute drop of the almost invisible cobra venom spreads swiftly all over the body of one into whom it has been injected, so one drop of the gall of unlove in my heart or yours, however unseen, has a terrible power of spreading all through our Family, for we are one body - we are parts of one another ... If unlove be discovered anywhere, stop everything and put it right, if possible at once...

"No wonder," writes Puritan Nathaniel Vincent, "that Satan, who labors to destroy churches, endeavors to kill love ... Return, O love, return! Repair breaches, restore paths to dwell in..." ... Love can be revived...(Rev 2:5)⁸

Which takes from Divine Mathematics to **The Gospel Applied in Practice**

The way to revive lost love in Rev 2 is to remember, to repent of our loss of love, and to recommit to deeds of love like we did at first before we lost it. If our lack of love has affected relationships, we need to repent before them, and seek to repair and restore relationships as much as is possible, as much as it depends on us. We must take responsibility for our part or contribution, not keep rehearsing in our mind the other person's lack of love. Don't let the poison spread. Don't let it go to next Sunday to communion in disobedience.

How do we stop focusing on others and love we haven't received? We have to focus somewhere else, Christ's love for us despite our lack of love. We were naturally utterly unlovely spiritually but He loved us and died for us. This chapter is called the 'love chapter,' but I want to call it 'the love of Christ chapter.' It's a Christ-centered chapter about the love of Christ and from Christ, through Christ, to Christ's people, and for Christ's glory. In chapter 9 Paul says 'woe to me if I do not preach the gospel' (v. 16), so woe to me if I preach from what it says on love devoid of the gospel as its source

Phil Ryken in his excellent book I recommend *Loving the Way Jesus Loved* '...we ought to admit that we do not love the way Jesus loved. We may be nothing without love, but unfortunately we are nothing like the lovers God wants us to be... We *are* nothing without love—this is the message of 1 Corinthians 13:1-3. But Jesus *does* nothing without love... Paul encourages us to read the Love Chapter in a Christ-centered way by the dramatic shift he makes between v. 1-3, where he speaks in the first person ['I...my'], and v. 4-8, where love is personified [*agape* is, not me]. First the apostle tells us what he cannot do without love; then he tells us what only love can do. And the reason love can do all these things is it has become incarnate in Jesus'⁹

Turn to the end of 1 Corinthians, chapter 16. Jesus calls us in the gospels to love the Lord with all our heart, soul, and mind. That's the first and greatest commandment, therefore our greatest sin is failing to love the Lord with all that we are, all the time. 16:22 *If anyone has no love for the Lord, let him be accursed.* That's bad news: a curse is on all who don't love the Lord Jesus. None of us love Him as fully as His command demands but '*God so loved the world He gave His only begotten Son that whoever believes in Him...*'

We all sin and fall short of God's glory and God's love defined in 1 Cor 13. But Jesus actually spoke the languages of men and of angels in heaven and He prophesied and actually knew all mysteries and really had all knowledge and actually could command mountains to move (in Revelation He will!). He actually gave all that He had and actually gave up His own body to die, and He did it all for love, with love, to save and change us by love to love.

So there's hope in this love of Christ chapter for sinners in need of this love. There's salvation here by the love of Christ who lived this for me perfectly. There's power in the love of Christ from this chapter to overcome your lack of love and to help you forgive those who haven't loved you and show love to them. There's grace in this chapter for the husband not loving or leading his family, and strength for the wife who struggles to love him or her state in life. There's help in the love of Christ chapter for friend and family issues and there's application in it for all our relations or situations, starting with when we get impatient. That's all an introduction to tonight's study on 'love is patient.' There's more I hope you'll come back for tonight, this summer.

For now let's close with how a recent song paraphrases and makes a prayer

If I sing but don't have love, I waste my breath with every song
I bring an empty voice, a hollow noise

If I speak with a silver tongue, Convince a crowd but don't have love
I leave a bitter taste with every word I say ...

If I give to a needy soul but don't have love then who is poor?
It seems all the poverty is found in me ...

When it's all said and done, When we sing our final song
Only love remains, Only love remains

[Here's the prayer] So let my life be the proof, The proof of Your love
Let my love look like You and what You're made of

How You lived, how You died, Love is sacrifice

So let my life be the proof, The proof of Your love [group: For King & Country]

¹*The Greatest Thing in the World, and Other Writings*, re-published by Dover Publications, 2014, first published in 1880.

² Gordon Fee, *The First Epistle of Corinthians* (NICNT, Eerdmans, 1987), p. 626.

³ Drummond, p. 3.

⁴ Phil Ryken, *Loving the Way Jesus Loves*, p. 19.

⁵ D.A. Carson, *Showing the Spirit: A Theological Exposition of 1 Corinthians 12-14* (Baker, 1987), p. 60.

⁶ Jerry Bridges, *Growing Your Faith* (NavPress, 2004), p. 164-65.

⁷ Alexander Strauch, *Leading with Love* (Lewis and Roth, 2006), p. 12-13.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 21-22.

⁹ Ryken, p. 28-29.