

1 Corinthians 13

All you need is love
The Living Gospel, Part 15
June 18, 2017 – Spence Shelton

[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.

[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.

[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.

[13] So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

Happy Fathers Day! To you dads in here – The bible calls your children arrows in the hands of a mighty warrior. I pray often that we, the dads of Mercy Church, will rise to the difficult, non-glamorous but God-glorifying calling of raising a generation of missionaries who will be ready to be sent, like an arrow, one day to take the gospel to new places. Dad life ain't easy. Lame dad jokes are a perk for sure, but its hard work. We are here to walk with you.

As you know this is one of the most well known passages in the bible. It gets separated from its context so often to be about romantic love. Nothing wrong with that because that is ONE application. BUT, it's primarily about love in the church. 1 Corinthians 12 – spiritual gifts. Chapter 14 – gifts again. Paul doesn't just drop a hallmark card in the middle.

But this one gets highlighted because in our day LOVE is perhaps the most celebrated of all human virtues. Broadway, Hollywood, Motown, & Nashville know nothing sells like a really good love story. Love is powerful!

The British philosophers The Beatles once said, “all you need is love. Love is all you need.” And because it's all we need, we give all of ourselves to it.

Contemporary Theologian John Legend Says “All of me loves all of you.” That’s about all I’m going to quote. WE LOVE LOVE! That’s why this passage is often read at weddings. I read this at 2 of my college friends’ weddings. I think this is one of those passages that connects our present day human experience with the God described in the bible. So even if you don’t understand or don’t agree with a lot of what the bible says...you feel like this is common ground. After all, Love should be celebrated!

Yet, for all the hype love gets...we really have a pretty deficient understanding & practice of love don’t we? Those people whose romantic lives we celebrate on the E! Network...they change spouses as often as they change wardrobes. It’s not just romantic love that is deficient either. Churches split up all the time because people fight and argue. That’s why main streets across small town America have first Baptist & new first Baptist across the street from one another. Groups of people still fight and rage against each other because can’t just get along.

For all of our celebration of love, we are perhaps the most malnourished generation EVER when it comes to giving and receiving real love. We want it. We want it from a soul mate. We want it from a parent. We want it from real friends & brothers and sisters. But yet it seems so elusive. Even the relationships we are in that should give us that love don’t seem to deliver like we hope.

Today we are going to dig in to love. I’m going to break this passage from the bible down in a way I saw this week that I thought was really helpful.¹

- verses 1-6: The Problem
- verses 8-13: The Solution
- verse 7 – The Application

The Problem

[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.

In these first three verses Paul is describing people who do religious things, but are not motivated by love. I mean these are **not** people who just talk the talk. These are people who using their gifts...to prophesy and help others. These are people who have the God given ability to believe he’s going to do big things. These are generous people who give away everything...even willing to give their bodies up. I mean, giving up yourself in martyrdom has to mean something right? Not without love.

¹ This structure comes from a sermon by Tim Keller on this passage

Here's what Paul is getting at: It is possible to do really great religious things totally for yourself. Now how could giving away everything, including your own body...ever be done for my gain? After all I'd have nothing left? What ulterior motive could I have?

You do it for honor and respect...you do it so that God will be obligated to accept you. So that you can feel superior to others who don't sacrifice like you do (Marx, Nietzsche, and Foucault said: religious sentiment and the thirst for power work hand in hand.)

Charles Spurgeon illustrated this principle in talking about a farmer who takes the biggest carrot he's ever grown and presents it to his king. The king is moved by this and so gives him 40 acres of land next to his own land. One of the king's court members sees this and thinks, "If this is what he gets for a carrot, what could I get for a horse!?" So he brings a fine horse to the king and says "King, here is my finest horse, I give it to you." The king saw through the ruse and said "The farmer gave the carrot to ME, but you are giving the horse to yourself."

This is what religious people do. It's a combination of two quiet, deadly sins that are the root of the problem Paul is bringing out:² **The Problem:**

² Awesome insight from J.D. Greear on the sins underneath all of our love-less religious activity. From his sermon "Loving People" in his series on 1st Corinthians.

- **Idolatry:** You need something other than God to be fulfilled. For religious people this is often the praise of others. I can't be satisfied in God's love so I go looking for approval. Praise from others is the idol. So we do seemingly loving things....SO THAT we will be given the affirmation of others. That's giving the horse to yourself. That's where the humble-brag came from. Sweating hard out here serving these starving orphans...how many likes do I get?
- **Works Righteousness:** When we don't believe God has accepted us through what Jesus did for us on the cross, we feel we have to earn God's acceptance. So, if we do good things then we'll feel good about ourselves because we are racking up points in the W column. Do more good to outweigh bad. That's exhausting. And its why you plummet spiritually when you sin because as if sin wasn't bad enough...now you think your salvation is in jeopardy

When you love for these reasons, you are just loving yourself. You are just trying to get attention! You are a noisy Gong or clanging symbol. You are the high school band member over in the corner with a cowbell. You got a fever...And the band is just your platform to let the 2yr old inside of you scream LOOK AT ME LOOK AT ME!!!!

What Paul does in verses 4-6 is describes true love by contrasting it to the fake love the Corinthians were expressing to one another. Remember, this portrait of love is about the love believers are supposed to show other

believers. Paul is rebuking them! So verses 4-6 become a kind of test to see if you have true love or fake love.

[4] Love is patient and kind... Are you patient? Or are you quick to fly off the handle? Are you kind or are you harsh towards those around you? You know the real way to assess this right? You may not like it but you know it. How do you treat those who cannot really give you anything? Are you patient and kind with your employees? With your children? With people in traffic? If you are kind to everyone and then a jerk to your family in the confines of your own home...that is fake love.

Love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant [5] or rude.... – Envy and boasting are just two sides to the same coin. When you look at what others have...are you jealous of them? Do you find yourself not understanding WHY they have the things you don't have when, come on...you are just as good as them. You are even better. And...this gets pretty dark in verse 6... [6] it does not rejoice at wrongdoing...do you rejoice when someone else fails? Do you enjoy talking about the problems of other Christians because it makes you feel superior!? Ya'll sometimes this is me. In my darkest hours, because I can get so captured by works righteousness....I find a certain part of me silently rejoicing when another pastor fails...because that will elevate me in the eyes of others. And I get envious when they succeed! OUCH! Do I care more about the gospel advancing or Spence advancing? And the test for that is...what if God says

yes to my prayer to bringing a Gospel Awakening to CLT but says he's going to use *another* church to do it?³ OUCH.

On the other side...you boast in your accomplishments & are arrogant about it. True love "does not insist on its own way;" (v6) but do you? Are you someone who has to do things your way or they are the wrong way? Do you refuse, even in the smallest of things, to submit your ways to the ways of others? Or do you really need the credit? It is not irritable or resentful; but rejoices with the truth. It doesn't get irritated or resentful when someone disappoints you. In fact it allows you to correct your own life to be in line with God's truth. Even gives you ability to speak truth into other people's lives without fear of rejection.

See what is happening in these verses? He's describing fake love. **And the common denominator about fake love is that it is conditional.** Fake love is a love for others is conditional on what they will do for you. On how they will make you feel. True love is the reverse. And for 12 chapters Paul has described the fake love of the Corinthians for one another!! Now he's putting it right out in front. ALLL of these problems in the Corinthian church...and there are a lot of them...ultimately stem from misplaced love.

The same is true today. How do you measure up to true

³ A confession we went through at Summit in RDU several years ago.

love as Paul has described it? And what do you do when you fall short? That's verses 8-13
Now lets look at the solution to this fake love problem.

[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.

[13] So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

The Solution: Put ALL of our faith, and all of our hope in the one thing that will never end: God's Love

What he's saying here in verses 8 – 13 is that all spiritual gifts are temporary signposts whose job is to point us to the permanent love of God for us. That make sense? Prophecy – speaking bold truth about God whether you like it or not...well that is needed now, but a day is coming where we won't need it. That's when we will be "face to face" with God. The gifts...they are like the moon. The moon has no light on its own, it just reflects light from the sun and so at night we can see dimly when the moon is out. But then, ever wake up in the morning and see the moon during the

sunrise? It slowly fades out of view because of the power of the light from the sun lighting up the sky. Our gifts reflect God's love like the moon reflects the sun. But when we are with God forever, there will be no need to reflect that love because we will be present with it! And how much brighter and better will it be!

C.S. Lewis talked about this: *And though they are small, physical pleasures are still too much for our present management. But what would it be like to taste at the fountainhead, that stream of which even these lower regions proves so intoxicating? Yet that is what lies before us. We long to be acknowledged. To bridge some chasm that yawns, to be the delight of God. For glory means acceptance with God. Response, acknowledgement, welcome to the heart of things. The door we have been knocking on all our lives will open and we will be called in and received.*

We can step into that river now! Lock in there church because there is the solution to our love problems. One day we will know fully as we are fully known. This "known" in the Greek isn't just head knowledge. It is intimate relationship. And here is the love we long for. We long for love where we are fully known and fully accepted. To be accepted but not known, that's just shallow sentimentality. To be fully known but not accepted... that is rejection. Something we all fear. But to be fully known...knowing everything about my innermost walled off self & still be fully accepted? That is the love we crave. And Paul says in verse 12...that is the love reserved for us in Christ.

DO YOU KNOW THAT LOVE!?!? You will see God face to face one day. You will see that love. Learn to see the reflections of that love of God now. Because to know God is to know true love. Bible says 1 John "God is love." (When we say, "God is love," we don't mean that love is God, any more than saying that grass is green, therefore everything that is green is grass.⁴) God is love means that love is an intrinsic quality of God. When you touch Him or see Him you are overwhelmed in love. It flows off of Him. God cannot fall in love for the same reason that water cannot get wet: it is wet, it is an intrinsic quality. To connect to Him is to connect to overflowing love."⁵

And the place you connect to that love is Jesus. It's the cross! Where you experience the love of God that is so strong, so satisfying...you will never look anywhere else for true love.

Matthew 13:44 "The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field."

You know what that means? The kingdom of God. That's what kingdom of heaven means. It's not primarily a PLACE, it's a REIGN. It's a ruler. It's the realm of the God who is Love...Being a citizen under that glorious, loving reign is SO

⁴ Analogy adapted from Peter Kreeft, "Love."

⁵ From Greear's Sermon "Loving People."

VALUABLE that losing everything on earth, but getting the kingdom...is a happy trade-off!⁶

Give yourself to that love! Are you still trying to prove yourself to others? STOP! Sell that! Are you trying to find love in being the most successful among your peers? Sell that & grab hold of real treasure! Are you looking for true love in a romantic relationship!? STOP! THAT'S JUST A DIM REFLECTION OF THE LOVE YOU ARE MEANT FOR! TRADE IT IN, Come to the field and grab hold of the treasure! Do you have a problem loving others? COME UNCOVER THE LOVE OF GOD FOR YOU!

Come to the cross!! You are malnourished on what it means to be truly loved. At the cross you are FULLY KNOWN. God knows your sin. He knows what you've done. Every thought, every act. Every time you've chosen yourself over your spouse. Dads every time you've chosen to escape instead of engage at home...God knows it. Every time you've cheated on a test, every time you've cut corners he saw it. Every fight where you chose vindicating yourself over unity with that person. Everything. God KNOWS YOU. And the worst thing is every sin...it is ultimately against God. Because every sin, at its core, is a search for love in the wrong place. AND GOD SAYS I SEE YOU! I see you malnourished sinner. AND I LOVE YOU! HE DIED FOR YOU! That's the kingdom of Heaven. The treasure in the field is

⁶ Adapted from John Piper "The Kingdom of Heaven is a Treasure."

that you don't deserve citizenship in the kingdom of heaven! You are a rebel who betrayed the king! You deserve death!

And because God is a just God...he will indeed carry out the sentence owed. He has to.

This is the story of the children's book the lion, the witch, and the wardrobe. Edward betrays his brothers and sisters. And now...the evil witch has King Aslan right where she wants him. Because the law says all traitors must be killed. And Aslan cannot break the law or the universe will implode. But she knows Aslan loves Edward. So she thinks, Aslan will suffer as he watches Edward die. But then...then Aslan goes up on the altar and offers his life in place of Edwards so that Edward can go free. And the witch thinks She's won! But then Aslan comes back from the dead and defeats death. Because true love, the love of God...can't be killed. Jesus was killed for your sin so that you could go free. But not free to live in a land where Satan ruled...he came back to REIGN over the world and defeat Satan so that you can live in his kingdom! You, the rebel...your sin has been paid for. And you are restored to a kingdom where the king of love reigns. That's the love of God for you!

COME TO THAT LOVE! GRAB HOLD OF THAT LOVE!
SURRENDER TO THAT LOVE! Maybe you need to do that today!

I want to finish with the application

[7] Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

See Christ calls us to abide in his love. That's John 15.9. That means to make our home in his love. Courtney and I and our family are packing up our house we've rented for two years and about to move. We were at the new house Thursday during the inspection to take measurements so we could figure out furniture and we were figuring out paint colors. We were taking steps to turn that house into our home. It takes a lot of time to make a house a home. It takes sweat & it takes making some memories. And God is saying make your home in HIS LOVE!

Aside: Some of you wonder why you don't feel like God is doing anything in your life and I'm like...you don't live with him! God's love is a hotel room you visit once in a while but he's not home for you. You want the closeness to God without the relationship. You are looking for a spiritual prostitute, not the true God. But the true God is waiting for you and wants to know you if you will truly abide in him.

When we make our home in that love, we start to love others differently. That's what verse 7 is describing. Love bears all things and believes all things. Hopes all things and endures all things. When you pause at those descriptions and get past the hallmarkness of it...it's not pretty. It says love goes expects to go through some hard stuff. ALL KINDS

OF THINGS. Is that you? Do you extend *that* kind of love towards others?

This is the love that says...I am going not going to be gullible OR cynical. I'm aware of your potential to hurt me I'm not gullible, but I'm going to choose to extend love and trust to you over putting up walls because I know what people are like. I'm not going to live angry & bitter anymore because...Christ's love heals the pain I am expressing through anger & resentment. See when the Christian has the treasure in the field, when he/she has made their home in that love, I can love others and "endure" the pain of someone who disappoints me. Because I am completely secure in Christ's love. In fact, I can forgive you when you hurt me and we can completely reconcile because that is the pattern of love I have learned from my king who forgave me and brought me back into his love when I didn't deserve it.

This doesn't mean you let people run all over you. Of course not. But you stop them for their sake instead of for yours. And that's a huge difference. That's gospel grace. And it springs from living face to face with love of the one true God.

You know what else this does? It frees you to run after God's purpose for your life. I feel like this coming year God is calling us, as a church, to step out and trust him in some big ways. Will you invite others into the love of God? Who is the person in your life that needs gospel love? There are

some people who will never step foot in this room. But you know them. You interact with them. And you see how they are trying to build a life apart from God. And you know they need this love that Christ gives. This love that has freed you. And NOW, now that you have this love you are free to risk your relationship for their sake. Who is your one? Will you walk across the room, across the driveway, across the hall, and begin that conversation?

Rosaria Butterfield – Neighbor who they only knew by first name. We'll call him Gary. They committed to making friends with neighbors so they got to know everyone, even Gary. Who kept to himself, was single, but they invited him over. He kept coming. Not a great friendship but a relationship. One day DEA storms Gary's house. Turns out Gary was a major drug dealer. When questioned, neighbors all point to Rosaria's family saying, "they were friends with him." Neighbors shun the Butterfields for befriending a dealer. Were they in on it? That's the reputation risk. They visit him in prison still and guess what...Gary became a believer in prison.

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