**BEING THE CHURCH**

**“LOVE” - 1st Corinthians 13**

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**Last Week:**

1st Cor. 12 presented two important topics;

1. The Gifts of the Spirit

2. The Body of Christ

The chapter ends with the verse:

**1st Corinthians 12:31**“But earnestly desire the best gifts. And yet I show you a more excellent way.”

The next chapter after this, Chapter 14 begins with this verse –

**1st Corinthians 14:1** *“*Pursue love, and desire spiritual gifts…”

*…and in between,* is arguably the most important chapter in all the epistles. Because it gives the clearest description of the most important thing in the world, “Love”.

When Jesus was asked “what is the greatest commandment in Matt 22:36, He replied “Love!”

**Matt 22:37-39** “**37**Jesus replied: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’**38**This is the first and greatest commandment. **39**And the second is like it: “Love your neighbor as yourself.”

Paul uses chapter 13 to clearly define Love for what it is, and also what it is not.

1st Corinthians 13 is known as the “Love Chapter” *(“Love is patient, Love is kind…)* It is some of Paul’s most quoted work and likely the most popular commentary on the word Love ever written. It has probably been quoted on many plaques, wedding cards, ceremonies and sermons that you’ve encountered throughout your life.

**1st Corinthians 13**

*“A More Excellent Way …”*

The Corinthian church was divided. Paul has now spent the first 12 chapters trying to clarify the issues that they were divided over. Explaining the proper way to resolve differences. About the proper functioning of the Body of Christ. And about the proper use of spiritual gifts.

**1st Cor. 13:1-3** “If I speak in the tonguesof men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. **2**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 do not have love, I am nothing. **3**If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.”

In this first section Paul seems to go back over several of the manifestations that he listed in the previous chapter and declare that they are meaningless if they are not done out of love.

1 “If I speak in the *Tongues* of men or of angels, but do not have love,

I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal.

2If I have the gift of *Prophecy*,

 and can *fathom all mysteries* (Word of Wisdom),

 and all *knowledge,* (Word of Knowledge)

and if I have a *Faith*

that can *move mountains*, (Working of Miracles)

but do not have love, I am nothing.

He then goes on to say the same thing about charity and suffering and even martyrdom, that if they are not done out of love, they amount to *nothing*.

3**“**If I *give all I possess to the poor* and *give over my body to hardship* *[ “to be burned” - KJV]* that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.”

He is underscoring Jesus’ words about love being paramount in all we do, and it is even more important than what we do, regardless of how impressive or spiritual it may seem.

*It is interesting to note that the KJV uses the word “charity” instead of “love”. The word “charity” in the New Testament refers to “compassionate giving”, as exercised in benevolence towards the poor. The KJV replaces the word “love” (agape) with a word that means “almsgiving” which is not the same as the sacrificial love that is expressed in this chapter. (1611 vernacular?)*

With all this emphasis on the word love, Paul makes sure that it is clearly defined. So in the next four verses, he gives us the famous definitions of what Love is, and isn’t. It’s important to know that he only uses the “agape” form of the word love in these verses which is the highest, most sacrificial of all the Greek words for Love.

**Agape - Love**
There are three words in the Greek that we would translate as love, but they mean three very different things.

1. "Eros" — Love that appeals to the senses.

2. "Phileo" — Personal affection, a fraternal or familial love.

3. "Agape" - Unconditional, sacrificial love.

 **John 15:13** “Greater [*agape*] has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.”

**1st John 4:8** “God is [*agape*].

**1st Cor. 13:4-7**

**4**Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud.

**5**It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.

**6**Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.

**7**It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

8a Love never fails.”

15 examples of what love IS or ISN’T:

1. **Patient -** Agape is patient. Patience is difficult for our human nature. Our flesh rejects patience, and yet, all through the Word of God, we see God's examples of patience toward us and Biblical commands to be patient. (A fruit of the Spirit).
2. **Kind -** Love is kind. There is not a clearer expression of love as simple kindness.
Rom. 2:4 “...The kindness of God leads you to repentance” (also a fruit of the Spirit)
3. **Does not envy -** Not Jealous**,** Not covetous about other people’s things or possessions.

*1st Cor. 3:3 “...for you are still controlled by your sinful nature. You are jealous of one another and quarrel with each other.”*

1. **Does not boast -** Saying things to inflate your own pride or status compared to others.

1st Cor 5:6**“**Your boasting is not good. Don’t you know that a little yeast leavens the whole batch of dough?

1. **Is not proud –** Pride is one of the most insidious sins*.(Lucifer, Adam & Eve, etc.)*

Prov. 16-18 **“**Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.

1. **Does not dishonor others** - Speak well of one another.

Romans 12:10 “take delight in honoring each other.”

1. **Is not self-seeking**

Does not demand its own way. Loving others means putting them ahead of ourselves as opposed to being; self-centered, selfish, self-seeking, and self-absorbed. The Bible addresses all of this thoroughly in one verse:

***Phil. 2:3*** *“Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself.”*

**8. Not easily angered -** It is not irritable orIs Not easily Provoked. When we get angry and exasperated, our temper flares, we are not acting out of love, we are being driven by own pride or selfishness.

**9. Keeps no record of wrongs**. “Does not keep an account a wrong suffered.” Agape love is an unconditional and forgiving love. Agape doesn't keep a list of other’s wrongdoings or keep a record of someone else’s sins.

**10. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth –**

Evil has no appeal to love. Nothing that dishonors God or is destructive to others is attractive or delightful to love. On the contrary, love rejoices when someone is redeemed by God’s grace and set free from evil by the truth.

**11. It always protects,**

**12. always trusts,**

**13. always hopes,**

**14. always perseveres -** Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through everycircumstance “Bears”, “Believes”, “Hopes”, and “Endures All Things”. If you're showing true agape love, you will overlook offenses, even those committed against you. You will be the kind of person who gives others the “benefit of the doubt”. You will endure any hardship or circumstance. You will continue to hope for restoration of relationships.

Jer. 31:3 “I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you.”

**15. Love Never Fails -** AgapeLove never gives up, never ends and never stops.

“*Love never fails”* is actually the opening line to the next section where Paul once again brings up the list of manifestations that he laid out in 1st Cor. 12. This time he points out that they are temporary and there will be a day where we no longer need them.

**1st Cor. 13:8-10 “**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. **9**For we know in part and we prophesy in part, **10**but when *completeness* comes, what is in part disappears.”

Verse 10 “*but when completeness comes, what is in part disappears*”. [KJV “But when that which is perfect is come”]

This is another very controversial verse among doctrines. There are many wonderful brothers and sisters (and Bible teachers) who believe that Paul is saying that someday when we have the complete Holy Bible, we won’t need spiritual gifts and manifestations anymore and they will have ceased. This is known as the Cessationist view of scripture.

Our denomination C&MA, holds to a Continuationist view, which is the belief that all the spiritual gifts, including healings, tongues, and miracles, are still in operation today, just as they were in the days of the early church. We believe that when we get to heaven, we will experience completeness in Jesus (glorification) and those temporal manifestations and gifts won’t be necessary anymore.

**1st John 3:2** “Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we shall be. We know that, when He appears, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is.”

*In heaven – all things will be revealed.*

**1st Cor. 11-12** “**11**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 the ways of childhood behind me. **12**For now we see only a 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.”

Paul is one of the most educated, scholarly, spiritually enlightened and inspired writers if the entire Bible. He wrote half the books in the New Testament and much of what we know of Christian Doctrine, is written by him.

In these verses however, he admits to only seeing a “reflection” and knowing “in part”, not fully. In other words, we won’t know the entire truth of God until we get to heaven, but “For now we see in a mirror, dimly”, and in part, but then we shall see face to face.

**Last Verse**

**1st Cor. 13:13 “**And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the *greatest of these is love*.”

Why is Love greater than Faith and Hope?

Faith and Hope, much like the spiritual gifts are very valuable here on earth but won’t be the same when we get to heaven. Here’s why;

**Heb 11:1** ““Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.”

* **Faith** – In heaven the things hoped for will already be fully experienced, and the things “not seen” will be fully revealed and be seen.
	+ **Titus 2:13** “we wait for the “blessed hope”—the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.”
* **Hope** – The things we now only hope for, will all be fulfilled with Jesus in Heaven.
* ***LOVE*** – *Is everlasting*

**Psalm 136:26** “Give thanks to the God of heaven. *His love endures forever.”*

His Love endures forever, it is not temporal. The same love we experience here on earth will be the love we will know in heaven, only not just “in part” then it will be face-to-face.

This is why Love is so important. Loving each other is the most important thing in the world, second only to loving God (the first and 2nd greatest commandments.)

Paul just told us it’s more important than spiritual gifts, ministry skills, more important than talents, more important than miracles, more important than social-justice charities, even more important than martyrdom.

In fact Jesus tells us that the way people will be able to tell if we are truly His disciples is not by our doctrine, not by our words, not by our church affiliation or even our Bible memorization. It is by our love, and not just random love for anyone anywhere, by our love for one another.

**John 13:34** “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.

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

This message is of utmost importance to the church. If we have not stressed it enough, we have missed the mark.

Jesus tells us to love one another, and here we see very practical examples of what love looks like;

**4**Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud.

**5**It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.

**6**Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.

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Let’s endeavor to love each other in these 15 practical ways. Ask God to help you when it’s difficult and forgive you when you fail.

Help others when they are difficult and forgive them when they fail.

**Romans 12:9-10** **“**Don’t just pretend to love others. Really love them. Hate what is wrong. Hold tightly to what is good. **10**Love each other with genuine affection, and take delight in honoring each other.”

*Put simply: Love is the opposite of Sin.*

This is the secret to success in “*Being the Church”.* A church who really loves each other is irresistible. Every person is made in God’s image. That means they are created with an innate desire “To Love and to Be Loved”. When you meet that need in them, you connect them to the heart of God, because God is love.

**1st Peter 4:8-11“**Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. **9**Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. **10**Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms. **11**If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.”