

1 Corinthians 13:1-13

“The Way Of Agape”

This morning we come to no doubt the most important Ch in *this* book and I would place it right up there with one of the most important Ch’s to personalize and internalize in the entire bible. (Not that we can speak with categorical importance when it comes to the Word of God, we obviously need it all. But certainly there are various aspects of it that are more relevant to us as NT believers than say one under the old covenant, under the Law of Moses; this Ch most definitely being one of them.) Because as you know 1st Cor Ch 13 speaks specifically to the topic of love.

and In that it gives insight as to the fingerprints of Christ in a person’s life. Jesus said, “*By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.*” John 13:35 John reemphasizes that same principle in his 1st epistle in words like, “*He who loves his brother abides in the light,*” 1 John 2:10 In Ch 3 he writes, “*We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love his brother abides in death.*” 1 John 3:14 and Again in Ch 4, “*If someone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also.*” 1 John 4:20-21 and So with all this emphasis placed upon “love” in the body of Christ, surely we can concede to the fact that it would be critically important to at least have some insight and understanding as to what constitutes love as expected/demanded by the scriptures. and Amongst other places that’s in large part where Ch 13 of the book of 1st Corinthians comes into play.

Not that it “defines” love, many people view this Ch as a definition of love, I’m not so sure that it’s love defined so much as it is love *displayed*. It’s love *portrayed* in the life of the believer. It’s how love will surface and show itself in your life as you grow and mature in Christ.

Let me just say right out of the shoot that I don’t pretend to be able to expound on this portion of scripture in such a way as to give it any form of justice. It’s been likened to dissecting a flower, once you’ve dissected say, a rose, well you may have gained a greater understanding of it, but in the process it’s been stripped of the overall beauty given to it. This is one of those Ch’s that as we dissect it we hope to gain greater understanding of it, but in the process I fear that we may strip it of some of the overall beauty given to it. So I would suggest that you take the time to read it later on, not in part but in whole, just stand back and gaze upon it’s beauty, soak in some of the rays of the warmth of this Ch.

Something else I would point out as we prepare to dive in is that it’s no mistake that the Holy Spirit inspired Paul to place this Ch in the context that he did. You have gifts of the Spirit and body life represented in Ch 12, and gifts of the Spirit and body life represented in Ch 14, and sandwiched right in between the 2 is this Ch speaks to the topic of love. Why? Because love is to be in the very center, at the very core of everything we say and/or do as the body of Christ.

All that we do is to be centered *on* and motivated *by* the love of God in our lives. Remember Paul said, “*For the love of Christ compels us,*” 2 Cor 5:14 That is, it constrains us; it motivates us and stirs us to action. So in order to catch the context and follow the flow let’s back up to Vs 31 of Ch 12 and begin there.

Vs31-3

Now as we begin our dissection of this Ch with regards to love if you’re a note taker you might jot down something to this effect: #1 Vs 1-3 *The Preeminence Of Love*, #2 Vs 4-7 *The Performance Of Love* (Love practically portrayed), and #3 Vs 8-13 *The Permanence Of Love*. and You should realize that Paul is not seeking to polarize one against the other, gifts Vs love.

He’s simply seeking to explain to us the proper arena in which the gifts of the Spirit operate. We might understand the gifts of the Spirit to be various containers, and containers in and of themselves don’t profit us much if at all; profit comes from what’s inside those containers. and The substance and value that is to be contained in the gifts of the Spirit is love, love is what gives those gifts their worth, their value. I won’t rehearse it again but you recall we’ve drawn attention to the fact throughout the course of our study in 1st Cor that spiritual gifts don’t necessarily make a person spiritual. The mark of true Christian maturity is not various gifts operating in a person’s life, but rather the proven character of the love of God coursing through them. and Apart from that love any gift I *have*, or any service I may *give* is of no value eternally speaking.

and I suppose if there were ever a Ch that demanded an explanation of what kind of love we’re in reference to here, this would be the one. Most of you are no doubt well aware of this but there’s a very specific type of love that’s in view here as we’re speaking about this love that’s to be flowing *into* and coursing *through* our lives. **But because our English language is so limited all we can do is issue the word “love” in a given situation and trust the context to explain our intent to the reader or hearer in a given situation. For instance I can tell you that I love my wife, I love vanilla bean ice cream with caramel sauce layered over the top, and I love amusement parks and roller coaster rides.** But surely you can discern that the way I love my wife is uniquely and distinguishably different than the way I love ice cream, and the way I love ice cream is distinctly different than my affection for amusement parks. But all I can do is tell you that I “love” these things and trust the context to illustrate my intent.

The Greek language is much more expressive and articulate utilizing no less than 4 different words that translate into the single common English word “love.” There is the word “Eros” and you can no doubt figure out that this is where we derive our word “erotic” it’s a sensual type of love. On a purely natural level it’s the form of love that stirs the physical attraction between a man and a woman, a husband and his wife. It’s love on a physical level. Then there’s “Storge” this would be the love that’s shared in the family, a parent to his/her children, children to parents, sibling to sibling, family members in general. There’s also “Phileo” which is possibly the highest level of love that the natural man is capable of apart from God. It’s the love of deep friendship and affection, the bible describes this type of love between David and Jonathon. They had a deep, bonding love between them; it was nothing perverse it was totally pure, brotherly love. However none of those words is the word in view here when we’re speaking of this type of love.

The word in view here is the word “agape,” and agape love is something completely out of reach for the nonbeliever, because it’s impossible to love with this kind of love apart from the reality of Christ at work in your life. We might understand agape as a love that takes the initiative, that wills to love and do good to the recipient regardless of how the recipient responds, and regardless of whether or not they’re a worthy, deserving, or even likeable person. **It’s not a love that seeks to get something out of a situation, it doesn’t love in order to invoke a particular response, it doesn’t demand attention or expect a re-payment. It’s a love that absorbs wrong and doesn’t retaliate (i.e. eye for an eye); it’s giving and sacrificial in nature. “For God so loved the world He gave His only begotten Son.” It’s both giving, and sacrificial, and expects nothing in return. So this is the type of love Paul is speaking of when he says (Vs 1 read).**

We might picture a massive orchestra at the hands of a master conductor. and Let’s say he’s conducting the stringed instruments in a particular section of a certain score, and right in the middle of some guy stands up all out of order and blows a horn all sour and off key. It’s not going to do anything of value; as a matter of fact it’ll distract the people from the flow of what’s happening and work ruin in moment. **Or if I walked over to the drums here and just started wailing away on the cymbals how soothing and profitable would that be? Yet that’s what tongues add up to apart from the love of God fueling them. and As you know the Corinthian believers were enamored by the gift of tongues, all rattling off at the same time, no order whatsoever, complete chaos, no consideration for anyone else. and Paul is saying, “It’s not doing anyone any good, because it’s not operating in love.”** Though I speak with the tongues (or languages) of men and of angels, some prayer languages may not even be in a tongue that’s familiar to this world, perhaps angelic in nature. “What’s angelic language?” I have no idea, but that’s not the point. The point is that if love isn’t my motive in saying what I have to say (regardless of what language I speak) then there really is no point to it. It’ll be of the same value as a sounding brass or a clanging cymbal; an irritation and a distraction.

Vs2

So again “giftedness” isn’t the primary proof of God’s presence and approval of a person’s life. The Corinthian believers were radically gifted, but completely carnal, definitely not God approved, the agape love of God is the fingerprint, the fruit of the Spirit in your life. Remember Gal 5? “...the fruit of the Spirit is love,” Gal 5:22 not tongues, or prophecy, or knowledge or faith. and It seems obvious that Paul is referencing something Jesus said when he speaks of faith that would move mountains here. When He said that if we had the faith of a mustard seed we could say to a Mt “move from here and go to there” and it would obey us. But the Holy Spirit through Paul is telling us that even if we had the faith to see the otherwise impossible accomplished, but the goal wasn’t love, the motive wasn’t love, than I’m nothing, I’m of no eternal value to anyone. and Don’t misunderstand this to mean he’s speaking about being friendly to people “If you’re not friendly you’re no good” that’s not what he’s saying. He’s speaking about denying ourselves for the sake and well being of another. It doesn’t matter how gifted you may be spiritually, if you’re not utilizing those gifts in such a way as to bless the body, serve the body, edify and build up the body, than what good is the gift? If I’m only going to use them to serve myself than I couldn’t be any farther from the heart of God in that.

Vs3

Even magnanimous acts of benevolence, if the motive of my heart isn't to love people, and/or to demonstrate love to people, than all those things will profit me nothing, no eternal reward is gained by good works apart from the love of God. Is it possible to do good things apart from the love of God? **You bet it is, there are all kinds of benevolent things people do, but they don't do them because the love of God compels them. and They're done in the efforts of the flesh. and He's not trying to say that feeding the poor doesn't benefit the poor practically, but it won't profit you at all eternally if you do what you do in the efforts of the flesh rather than motivated by the love of God.** Jesus said, *"It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing."* John 6:63 Now, when you surrender yourself to the will and the work of the Holy Spirit in your life, do you know what He's going to do? He's going to pour God's love into your heart, into your life. Rom 5:5 *"...the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us."* **So you see we're talking here about the preeminence of love, oh you may not give your body to be burned literally, but how often we get busy, or want to "burn out" for God in the ministry, apart from love it's pointless.**

Warren Wiersbe in his book on being a servant of God wrote, "Ministry takes place when divine resources meet human needs *through loving channels* to the glory of God. If the motivation for our service is anything less than Christ's love – His love for us and our love for Him – our ministry will not really meet human needs or glorify God." That's what Paul is saying here, in everything I say and everything I do love is preeminent. Next we have the performance of love, love in action, the way love is portrayed practically.

Vs4-7

So there are both positive and negative aspects of love, things it will do, and things it won't do. and Though love may be difficult to *define*, it's not hard at all to *discern*. Here Paul pictures love in action. and In the Greek all these words that Paul uses describe love are verbs; and they're all in the present tense, which means they're a continuous ongoing never ending attribute. What's that mean? It means that true love (as God intended) is a verb, it's not a sentimental feeling or emotion, it's something I do or don't do. The agape of God involves attitudes and actions, *not* affections. So often when someone is wanting out of a marriage relationship they tell you, "I just don't love him/her anymore." **and What they mean is, "I don't *eros* him/her," I'm no longer attracted to them. But what does that have to do with agape? Nothing, agape isn't predicated upon affections, emotions, give and take, it's only give, it's a choice that I make to love someone (by the grace of God) regardless of what I get out of it, it's not about that, I'm nothing thinking of me in the case of agape, only the other.**

and Paul begins here by telling us 2 things agape does/is, and then 8 things agape doesn't do or isn't, then rounds it off by giving us 5 more things that it does do. 1st of all to the positive, "Love suffers long." Translation; "Love is patient." Of course we see this attribute demonstrated by God in multiple places throughout the scriptures whether it was giving the people of Canaan over 400 yrs to repent, or the nation of Israel around 1,000 yrs to repent before judgment fell on them. But I suppose the best illustration is found in 2 Peter 3:9 which says, *"The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance."*

There's not a believer I know that isn't thankful for the longsuffering, the patience of God. Where would you be if the Lord returned 10 yrs ago, or 15-20 yrs ago (you get the idea). Now when we come to Christ we start praying, "Come quickly Lord Jesus" but we're thankful He didn't answer the prayers of the saints gone by that way! Love is patient with people, puts up with people who would otherwise get on your nerves, and is kind. Love is kind. That is it pays attention to doing good for others, the bible teaches us that it's the kindness of God toward us that leads us to repentance. Jesus not only taught the people in ways that astonished them, He also modeled His Words for them, He fed them, He healed them, He washed their feet, He didn't come to be served but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many, as many as would call upon His name. Love suffers long and is kind, it's the kind of love that after being beaten relentlessly, battered, bloodied, bruised and scourged unremittingly, seemingly endlessly, that as it's being nailed to a cross cries out, "Father forgive them for they know not what they do." It suffers long and is kind.

To the negative it *does not* envy. It doesn't seethe inwardly when someone else gets the job you put in for, or is being blessed in a manner you'd like for yourself personally. Safeguard your heart from envy, in the end it accomplishes nothing but hurt. If you love someone you'll rejoice with them, not be inwardly angry at them. and Don't dismiss envy as a small sin, it's huge. It was envy that murdered Abel (Gen 4:3-8), that enslaved Joseph (Gen 37:11, 28), and that placed Jesus on the cross. Matt 27 tells us that Pilate knew that, "...they had handed Him over because of envy." Matt 27:18

Love doesn't envy, nor does it parade itself (doesn't have to have the spot light.)

We think of the Pharisees sounding a trumpet as they would give to the poor or do some good work, making sure the evening news was there to report their good works. That's not love, that's parading *yourself*. Love has no problem not letting the left hand know what the right hand is doing, it can work under the radar, anonymously, doesn't have to have recognition. This one is tough for most of us, when I do some work around the house, or on the house, or whatever, man I want my wife to sing my praises, I want her recognition, I'm not perfected in agape.

It's not puffed up, doesn't get big headed, or act arrogant, and most if not all of these things root themselves in pride. It's my pride that envies, it's my pride that wants attention, that acts arrogant, behaves rudely, seeks it's own (so on and so forth) it's no wonder God hates pride.

Vs5

"Does not behave rudely," love will exercise good manners. It won't behave in a manner that's unbecoming or weird or out of control. "Does not seek it's own," I think that's pretty self explanatory, agape is "other's oriented." Paul told the Romans that they should be, "...in honor giving preference to one another;" Rom 12:10 We read earlier in this letter, "Let no one seek his own, but each one the other's well-being." 1 Cor 10:24 Or another way to understand that, "walk in love." Love considers the other individual, or individuals 1st before considering self. "Is not provoked." If your bible says, "Is not easily provoked." Just take your pen and scratch out that word "easily" because it doesn't exist in the Greek. I guess a translator with a quick temper translated that, love is not provoked.

We at times speak of the nature of sin that provokes someone, as parents we're not to provoke our children to wrath. We're not to provoke one another to wrath, but did you realize it was a sin to *become provoked* (I'm not talking about righteous indignation; I'm talking about letting someone set you off). **Regardless of how much someone is getting on your nerves, think of Moses. If there were ever a temperate, mild mannered man it was him, yet the children of Israel provoked him to anger 1 time and it cost him the Promised Land. Love extracts the excuse to be angry at people. Because it treats others patiently, kindly, as we would want to be treated. You accidentally cut someone off and it's "Ooops! Sorry ha ha ha..." and You don't think anymore of it, someone cuts you off and it's "Oh that jerk, where did that guy learn how to drive, he was in such a hurry to get out there and now he's just poking along!" But if we'd just treat him like we want to be treated, "Hey, ha ha ha, that rascal cut me off ;0)" then we wouldn't be provoked, we'd be walking in love.**

"Thinks no evil," now this word "thinks" speaks of computing or reckoning or calculating. It's an accounting term that speaks of entering something in a ledger so as not to forget it. More literally we might understand this to say that love doesn't keep track of wrongs. I'll never forget the time a gal wanted to meet with me about some various things and so my wife and I carved out some time and set up an appointment. and When she walked in and sat down she opened up a notebook where she had written down literally every detail of everything that she thought everyone had wronged her in and the various ways she'd been mistreated that she wanted to vent about and get off her chest. This is saying that love won't do that. Paul told the Ephesians, "...be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you." Eph 4:32 If you don't want God to keep a record of your wrongs, than don't keep the record of the wrongs of others, blessed are the merciful for they shall receive mercy.

Vs6

"Does not rejoice in iniquity," when bad things happen to other people, "they got theirs" is often times our mentality, it's not God's. Remember this scripture, "*As I live,' says the Lord GOD, 'I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live.'*" Ezek 33:11

Love doesn't rejoice, or take pleasure in iniquity, doesn't chew on the savory morsels of gossip, slander and hearsay, but rejoices in the truth. Even if it's hard to swallow, perhaps it's a faithful wound, love rejoices, takes pleasure in the truth.

Vs7

Of course the most difficult aspect of this Vs for all of us is those 2 little inescapable words, "...all things." There's no negotiating any of that, it's all inclusive, it doesn't say, "some things," or "most things" it says "all things." It bears *all things*, the idea there is that it seeks to cover. Peter put it like this, "*And above all things have fervent love for one another, for 'love will cover a multitude of sins.'*" 1 Peter 4:8 It doesn't proclaim the errors of others, doesn't glorify the enemy in giving voice to the fact of someone falling. It doesn't slander, it seeks to cover a brother or a sister, it doesn't repeat hearsay it covers it. Nor does it return fire when someone is slamming on me, I'll absorb that, cover that in love.

Charles Spurgeon said, “I would, my brothers and sisters, that we could all imitate the pearl oyster. A hurtful particle intrudes itself into its shell, and this vexes and grieves it. It cannot eject the evil, and what does it do but *cover* it with a precious substance extracted out of its own life, by which it turns the intruder into a pearl. Oh, that we could do so with the provocations we receive from our fellow Christians, so that pearls of patience, gentleness, long-suffering, and forgiveness might be bred within us by that which has harmed us.” **Love bears all things. Believes all things, now this isn't saying that love doesn't acknowledge the facts, think that everyone goes to Heaven regardless of where they were at with Christ, everyone is basically good...No, this is saying that love offers the benefit of the doubt, doesn't assume the worst in people, but the best in people. “If I do that I'll get burned.” That's right, you will, but that's between them and God, you're to let God have His way in *your* life.** God's big enough to take care of you; you just exude Christ to them. “Hopes all things,” optimistic in situations not pessimistic, you might be in a bad way, but love trusts the Lord to work it together for your eternal good and God's eternal glory. and “Endures all things.” Most of us could receive the idea of bearing, believing and hoping all things, just *not for very long*. One of the great things about the agape love of God in our lives is that it works in us the ability to keep on keeping on in all these things to the glory of God.

and Of course Jesus is the embodiment of all these things you place His name in there everywhere you see the word “love” and it flows real fine. Put yours in there and you'll see how much you have to grow. We don't get too far with out going “yeah right.” But you know what, as time goes by it should get less and less crazy sounding to insert your name in there as Christ is at work, having His way in you. Finally (quickly) for the permanence of love.

Vs8-13

The basic idea here being that love should be the primary pursuit in our Christian experience, not exclusively the gifts. The gifts are good, but they're temporary, however love will last forever. We read in Vs 8 that tongues, prophecies, knowledge; these things will come to an end. and This is the Vs people cling to who say that these gifts disappeared with the apostles. But the context makes it clear that the gifts of the Spirit won't vanish away until that which is perfect has come. In other words when we're with Jesus personally, be it His coming for us individually or the establishing of His Kingdom upon the earth practically, then there won't be a need for spiritual gifts, because Christ Himself will be with us. You know when the sun comes up you turn off the porch light. When we're with Jesus the gifts will be irrelevant. But until then we're only partial in our knowledge, in our understanding. It's like looking into a mirror. Oh not a mirror like we have, their mirrors were polished brass, no matter how highly polished they were the image was always a bit distorted.

That's how we see Christ now; we're immature in our understanding, like kids comparatively to what we will be. But when we're with Christ, then we'll see clearly, then we'll be mature completely, we'll have perfect knowledge and all the rest. We'll know even as God knows us, will we know each other in Heaven? You bet, even as God knows us now, you'll have perfect knowledge.

Vs13

These other 2 will find their resolve when we're with the Lord. But love; it's eternal, the very nature of God Himself. God doesn't need faith like we need faith, He believes in nothing outside of Himself, He doesn't need hope like we need hope, He knows the end from the beginning. But love, God *is* love, and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God (1 John 4:7). Love is preeminent, it performs in practical ways, and it's permanent, it's the way of Agape.

Prayer Points:

God we pray that You would mature us in this love, increase our love that we might be vessels of love through whom You can flow. We realize that *we'll* see You one day face to face, but now Lord we desire *others* to see You as You manifest Yourself in our lives through Your love. Help us not to obscure Your image through self seeking, or pride, but that Your will would be done, Your way. We thank You for Your love, Your goodness and Your grace.

Perhaps you've never come to know and experience the love of God in a personal way. Today I want to invite you to receive God's love, His forgiveness and His grace, He's been so patient with you, waiting on You not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. **and He has so loved you that He gave His only begotten Son for you. Jesus sacrificed Himself upon the cross that you might be forgiven of all your sin and made brand new in Him. All you have to do open your heart, believe upon Him, repent of your sin and invite Him in. Just call upon the name of the Lord and you'll be washed whiter than snow.**

(In Closing)

In that same book on being a servant Wiersbe wrote, "The love that we need for ministry is not a natural ability; it's a supernatural quality that only God can provide. When the people we serve irritate us or disappoint us, the 1st thing we usually do is pray for them and tell the Lord to change them. What we ought to do 1st is pray *for ourselves and ask God to increase our love.*"

Because if not what happens is that bitterness/resentment builds up in our hearts and gives the enemy a foothold in our own hearts and then it'll only snowball from there.

So may God increase His love in your life abundantly, and may you display and portray Him clearly for all to see.