

Going into 2019, I can't think of anything that matters more than love. Many of us were raised in homes where we saw love lived out. Certainly, we didn't see perfect models, but we saw good models. But for others of us, we didn't see love in our homes. Instead, we saw fights for control. We saw selfishness. We saw negative models that affect many of us today. Most of us want to better understand love. We want to understand what it means to love others and receive love from others.

Understanding how to love is difficult. It takes a lifetime to learn. It's a good thing we have a lifetime to learn it and practice it with an eternity to enjoy it. It's important we understand that God's love, which is the best kind of love, is put inside us, in our hearts, because of our faith in Jesus Christ who died on the cross for our sins. And as followers of Jesus, we can love as Jesus loves. We can love our friends, our families, our neighbors, and our co-workers in the same way that Jesus loves them.

Our Bible text comes from I Corinthians chapter 13. We will try to answer two questions. "Why Does Love Matter?" and "What Does Love Look Like?" I Corinthians 13 is a familiar passage. Most of us hear the familiar words of I Corinthians 13 at weddings.

But have we ever really thought about those words. Picture a wedding. I have been to probably 100 weddings. An adorable little flower girl walks down the aisle, followed by bridesmaids in beautiful dresses. Sharply dressed groomsmen fidget as they wait for the wedding start. A proud and smiling father of the bride ushers his beautiful daughter down the aisle. At a point in the service, a friend of the bride or groom stands up at the podium to read a scripture. And often they read this passage from I Corinthians 13.

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. 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. 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.

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.

Then the minister says a few encouraging words, the couple exchange vows, and the minister pronounces them husband and wife. The guests then head to the reception to find their places at tables at the reception, and while they wait for their food, they tell each other how beautiful the wedding was. They might even mention how beautiful it was to read I Corinthians 13 during the ceremony. But did the wedding guests really hear what was being read? It's a beautiful passage, but it also contains a serious warning. And the serious warning answers a question.

Why Does Love Matter?

The first three verses of I Corinthians points out the frightening possibility that we can go through life doing good things for God and for people, but when you add it all up after a lifetime, it will count for nothing without love.

First, here is a little background on our text today. I Corinthians is a letter written by the apostle Paul to a new church in the city of Corinth that was having some problems. Like most churches, they paid a lot of attention to their worship style. We can read in the letter that their church they had a very open style of worship. Everyone in the room was invited to share a word, a song, or a hymn in the service. Sometimes it was chaotic and lacked order. But other times they could sense, in a powerful way, the presence of God, and evidence of this was that sometimes God's Spirit would allow people to speak words of truth and encouragement in a language they didn't even know.

It's interesting Paul never said there was one particular style of worship that was better than another. That wasn't his issue. Here was his issue.

If we try to worship God without love, we accomplish nothing

Paul said if we worship, and even if the spirit shows up in powerful ways, but we have no love, we have nothing at all.

If I speak in the tongues[a] of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. v. 1

We can put together the greatest worship services, have the best preaching, the best building, the best lighting and sound system, and to make it even more of a mystery, we may even be able to sense the presence of God around us in a powerful way, but if there is no love, we have nothing at all. We may think we have something, but we don't.

Paul's warning applies to churches that may have great worship services, but it also can apply to churches that may have great ministries. To sum up this second point,

If we try to serve God without love, we are nothing

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. v. 2

Paul is warning us that a church can have the most gifted teachers who serve by proclaiming the Word of God with authority to all ages and stages. Or a church can have the wisest counselors, mentors, and be able to distinguish truth from error, and can give us thoughtful and helpful answers to the toughest questions. Or a church can have the most faithful leaders, who get things done, who can lead and advance programs, vision, and ministries, but if they don't have love, they have nothing. That is a serious accusation. Paul is saying that a someone is really no one without love. He continues: If we try to Sacrifice to God without love, we gain nothing

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. v. 3

Wait let's not gloss over this. If I give all? Now he is talking about a person who liquidates assets, pensions, property, into one big bag of cash and gives it all away. He is talking about extreme giving. There are places around the world where the cost of following Jesus may mean giving up one's life. Literally "give over my body to the flames." We can be a church that gives generously all they possess and who are willing to even give up their lives for the cause of Christ. But if we don't have love, we accomplish nothing.

To sum up these three verses, we accomplish nothing. We are nothing. We gain nothing without love. We can do a lot of good stuff and completely miss the point. Out of all the things in our lives that matter, God is saying, "Love matters most."

What does love look like?

In the next four verses, Paul gives us the distinguishing marks of genuine Love. Let's look just a little closer at these marks of love. Paul wrote,

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. vv. 4-6

Love is Patient

These marks of love are helpful because they help us get really practical. If you were to ask me, "Dan, do you love your kids?" I would answer, "Sure! Of course!" Then if you were to ask me, "Dan, are you patient toward your kids?" I would answer, "Well,

I think I have room to be more patient with them." You want someone to feel your love? Be patient with him or her. Loving marked with patience helps us to develop the capacity to deal with letdowns and disappointments that are unavoidable in a fallen world. Love marked with patience helps us put up with difficult people and desperate situations.

Love is Kind

The word kind in this passage is linked to the word generous. To grow in love is to grow in generosity. If we focus on bringing pleasure to others, especially to others in the family of God, we are growing in love.

Love does not Envy

Paul reminds us that there is always someone who is doing whatever you are doing, but they do it better. Think about what you do. You raise a child, you run a business, you play a sport, you take a test. The question becomes how do you respond to the person who is doing it better than you? Do you rejoice over their success or do feel sorry for yourself and ask, "Why didn't that happen to me?" God puts people in our lives who do better, get paid better, and look better to teach us how to respond and to learn how to love.

Love does not Boast; it is not Proud

One commentator translates a proud and boasting person as a windbag. A windbag is someone who only likes to talk about themselves. They have no interest in what is going on with others.

Love does not Dishonor Others

Literally, love is not rude. A mark of love is being courteous. Value others by saying please, thank you, well done, or I'm sorry for interrupting. Remember to be courteous to those closest to you.

Love is not Self-Seeking

You want to grow in love, stop being obsessed with self. I heard this week, "Love begets forgetfulness of self and forgetfulness of self is health."

Love is not Easily Angered

In other words, love is not easily upset, or quick to be offended. Ask yourself if there are people who tiptoe around you because they are afraid you will fly off the handle. If you are easily offended, you need a fresh filling of the love of Jesus. Because those filled with the love of Christ are not easily angered.

Love does not Keep a Record of Wrongs

People who are marked with love take no pleasure in another person's pain. I read this week, "When a man has fallen, love will think about the battle he must have fought, and the struggle he must have had before he went down." Love always thinks the best.

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

One more thing about love this morning. Love is marked with consistency. That means love never gives up. Our expression of love is not marked by occasional gestures of love. Our expression of love should come forth consistently as a mark of character.

How do we use this teaching? It's not that difficult for us to understand, but how do we apply it?

Patience, Generosity, Humility, Courtesy, Restraint, Joy, Consistency

We can use this Scripture to examine our lives. Here are some good questions for all of us to ask ourselves:

- A. With whom in my relationships do I need to be more patient?
- B. What do I need to change to become a more generous person?
- C. Which of my friends, my co-workers, my teammates do I need to rejoice with more and envy less?
- D. Who do I need to talk less about myself to and do a better job listening to?
- E. Where can I show greater courtesy than I currently do?
- F. Where do I lack restraint and show a bad temper?
- G. Is there somebody who's hardship has become a pleasure to me?
- H. What good thing happened in a person's life that should bring me joy this week?

I Corinthians 13 is like a big mirror, which reflects back to us who we really are. With what we have learned, we now know what is wrong, and we can make it right. Most of us don't ever change because we don't ever honestly examine ourselves.

How Does Jesus Help Us Love More in 2019?

I Corinthians 13 represents Jesus' life too. Jesus was the greatest teacher. He performed the greatest miracles. He made the ultimate generous sacrifice that no one else could make. Even with the great things he did, what was at his core? It was love. His works counted for something because at his core was love. As we move into 2019, I want to challenge you to feel Jesus' great love for you. Open your heart to Jesus. Follow Jesus with confidence.

Maybe you feel like your gifts are limited, and you feel like you are a nobody. However, if your love for Jesus is real and growing, you are a somebody. You are somebody beautiful to God because he offers you His grace. If you are growing in love, even something as small as giving a cup of cold water to a thirsty person doesn't go unnoticed by Jesus. If you have God's love in your heart, he notices even the smallest gesture of love.

So, use the Scripture this morning to strengthen your faith. When you read that God wants you to love, know God is leading

you to this. Know that when you love like Jesus, you are smack dab in the middle of God's will. When your tank is empty, when people don't treat you right, when old wounds surface, when your anger is about to boil over, thank God there is a place where you can be filled.

The message of Christianity is not, "You are a mess and don't measure up." The message of Christianity is, "You are a mess, but God's grace can re-create you, remake you, and fill you." The message of Christianity is that when you come to faith in Jesus Christ, and as you continue in faith, God pours his love into your heart by His Holy Spirit. If God pours his love into our hearts, the hearts of those who have put their faith in Jesus Christ, then we know we can become more loving people and reflect that love into the most challenging places we are called to go in 2019. So, let that truth strengthen our faith.

For us to grow in love, we must take the time to reflect on the love of Christ. And this will increase our joy if we let the sheer overwhelming force of his love flood our heart this morning.

With I Corinthians as our model, think of Jesus' patience. He was long-suffering on the cross. He could have come down, but he stayed there until death, and that is your salvation. Think of his generosity toward you, his kindness in your life. Can you even begin to count all the good gifts that he has showered on you? Think about his humility. That he was so intensely interested in you, he gave up his place on his throne in heaven to come to earth to bring God to you. Think about his courtesy. Think of the kids that came to Jesus and the disciples rebuked them. Then Jesus rebuked the disciples and invited the children to come to him. He wanted to listen to them, and he always has time for them, just as he has time for you today.

Think about his restraint. He was slow to anger and abounding in love. He says he will no longer remember your sins. He knows what I have done. He knows what you have done, but when all of it is placed under the blood of Christ, he will never bring it up again. Think about his joy. He rejoices over you as you will rejoice over him. Think about the consistency of His love. His love will never change and never end. We have a lifetime to learn it and practice it. And we have an eternity to celebrate it. May God's love increase your joy this morning. May God's love change your life.

Note to reader: I found Colin Smith's preaching series on I Corinthians 13 titled, Love: A Beginner's Guide to be very helpful for writing this message.

*This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail,
please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.*

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Catalog No. 1437-1FC

This message from Scripture was preached on Sunday, December 30, 2018 at Central Peninsula Church.

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