**January 30, 2022 1 Corinthians 13:1-13**

***What Is Love?***

**Scripture:** *1 Corinthians 13:1-13 NRSV*

*(1)If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have 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 do not have love, I am nothing. (3)If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing. (4)Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant (5)or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; (6)it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. (7)It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. (8)Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end. (9)For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part; (10)but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end. (11)When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways. (12)For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. (13)And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.*

**Notes:**

1. Love is **important**.
   * 1. Matthew 22:37-40, *“(37)… You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' (38)This is the greatest and first commandment. (39)And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' (40)On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”*
     2. 1 John 4:7-8, *“(7)Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. (8)Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love.”*
     3. John 3:16, *“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.”*
   1. Love is the most ***essential*** and ***eternal*** of all God’s gifts.
      1. “*(3)If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.”*
   2. Faith without love is ***empty***.
      1. Matthew 16:25-26, *“(25)For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. (26)For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life?”*
   3. Love is the ***anchor***, love is the ***key***.
2. Love is essential and important. But what is ***love***?
   1. “***Eros***” means I love you because you have something I want.
   2. “***Storge***” is the instinctual love of a parent for a child.
   3. “***Philio***” is love because of similarities as in friendship.
   4. “***Agape***.” is unconditional love;
   5. ***Agape*** love is the kind of love God has for us and Jesus calls us to have for God and our fellow human being.
3. There is coming a time when we will meet God ***face*** to ***face***!
   1. Love will ***remain***.
   2. Love is ***eternal***.
   3. Love often means ***saying*** you are ***sorry***.
   4. Love is so much more than a mere ***physical*** act.
   5. Love is ***essential***.
4. Jesus is the eternal, unconditional ***self***-***sacrificing*** love of God in the flesh!
   1. What did you do with the ***Love*** God has ***given*** you?
   2. You cannot ***outgive*** God.
   3. Love the Lord your God, with all that you have, and then love your ***neighbor*** in the same way.

**Script:**

Love, I hear the word and I begin to think of many things. I think of my parents and the love they have expressed to me. I think of my brother and sisters and the love we have for each other. I think of my wife, Janice, and the love that we share in our marriage. And then I think of my children, and the unconditional love that I have for them and their spouses, and then I cannot forget my grandson Lucian and the love I have for him.

We all have things that we relate to the word love. Like me there are the relationships we have and the love we share in them. But where do we find this idea of love, do we truly understand what love is, and how do we learn to love?

Today we look at the love passage in scripture, 1 Corinthians 13. As we look at this passage I challenge you to reevaluate your definition of love; consider how you demonstrate this love, and commit to striving to improve the love you share with others. Make an effort to strengthen the love you have for God and in return the way you see God loving not only you, but His creation.

Stand with me as we share in the reading of 1 Corinthians 13:

*1 Corinthians 13:1-13 NRSV (1)If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have 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 do not have love, I am nothing. (3)If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing. (4)Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant (5)or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; (6)it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. (7)It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. (8)Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end. (9)For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part; (10)but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end. (11)When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways. (12)For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. (13)And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.*

Love is important. Pop culture tells us many things; John Patrick wrote, “Love is a many splendor thing”; Erich Segal said, “Love means never having to say you are sorry”; Bob Merrill stated, Love makes the world go round”; and finally, the Beatles sang, “All you need is love.”

Ancient philosophers suggested that the world is made up of four basic elements: earth, air, fire, and water. The movie “The Fifth Element” imagined a fifth element that was needed to tie these other four elements together in order to save the world. That fifth and most important element was “Love.” The psychological theorist, Maslow, said that Love is one of the five basic needs of a human and that to be healthy and happy we need to love and be loved.

It is easy to see that the world considers love to be very important. But scripture commands this also; in Matthew 22:37-40 Jesus said, *“(37)… You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' (38)This is the greatest and first commandment. (39)And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' (40)On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”* It also says in 1 John 4:7-8, *“(7)Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. (8)Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love.”* And then we all know the verse John 3:16, *“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.”* Yet it is our sermon passage for today that really solidifies what love is; in many ways this chapter is the thesis statement for the entire book; Love is the most essential and eternal of all God’s gifts.

Oh, I am sure there are those who think that while Love is important, there are other things that are just as important and maybe even more important than love. What about preaching the Gospel; after all, its through preaching the word that people hear about Jesus, then accept him and get saved. What about Prophetic powers like the prophets of the Bible. They were able to tell God’s people what to do in very troubled times. Isn’t that kind of divine guidance important? What about faith? It’s through faith that we are saved by grace. And even the faith the size of mustard seed can move a mountain. That seems pretty potent. And what about martyrs––people who live their lives for the truth? Don’t their deaths mean anything?”

Yes these are all important gifts and practices, but listen to what verse 3 says, “*(3)If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.”* Preaching without love is just a bunch of whoopin’ and hollerin’. Faith without love is empty. Even prophetic wisdom is meaningless without love. Just think of Jonah and his visit to the Ninevites; he did not have any love for these people, and when he prophesied and told the people what the Lord had said, there was a great revival in Nineveh, But Jonah did not like it and did not gain anything from his ministry that day.

I think of a man who stood on a soap box outside of a venue that was promoting a Christian Music Concert, condemning those who were entering the building; proclaiming that all who were entering were going to be led astray. Where is the love in this, where is the good. But I also think of later in that same evening where the artist pulls out his bible and talks about Matthew 16:25-26, *“(25)For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. (26)For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life?”* Who had more love for the people there that evening? Which had the greater impact upon those who heard their words?

Love is the essential element that gives meaning to all the others. Without Love all those other things, as powerful and as important as they are, lose their meaning. It is like a parent who works hard to earn a living for their children. They work overtime and weekends to gain extra points with the boss, and move up in the company and in earning ability. Then the parent provides the children with a good house and good clothes and the best in educational toys and summer camps and after school programs. But the parent never spends time with the child to help them grow emotionally and spiritually. Without the love of the parent, all those other things lose their meaning. In the same way without love, wisdom, faith, even sacrifice, become unanchored in the sea of life and lose their place. Love is the anchor, love is the key, love is the essential element to all things in life.

So we all agree that Love is essential and important. But what is love? Both the church and the world speak of love but they often seem to be speaking of different things. The world speaks of falling in love of falling out of love. The world speaks of “making love” as a mere physical act of sex. Is love simply never having to say you’re sorry or is it more?

Perhaps the problem is that the English language lacks the vocabulary to speak of love. In the Greek language there are four different words for what we call “love”; Eros, Storge, Philio, and Agape. “Eros” is where we get the word erotic. It literally means I love you because you have something I want. This would describe someone who made nice to the boss to get a raise or who made a friend with someone to merely gain social prestige. This is the shallowest kind of love and most often refers to sexual desires.

Next, the word “storge” is basically parental love. It is the instinctual love that a parent has for a child, or a child for a parent. It is a love with an attachment due to a relationship. “Philio” is the third kind of love, and is referred to as brotherly love. It is used in creating the name of the city Philadelphia, the city of brotherly love. It is basically love because of similarities as in a close friendship.

And finally, the last word that refers to love, is “Agape.” This is unconditional love. It’s the opposite of “eros.” “Eros” is love for the sake of the self, but “agape” is love for the sake of the other. This is self-sacrificing love. This is the type of love Jesus refers to when he says “*No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. (John 15:13 NRSV)*”

This is the type of love Paul is speaking of in Chapter 13. Paul says, “*Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.*” This is the kind of love God has for us and that Jesus calls us to have for God and our fellow human beings. This unconditional self sacrificial love is why God sent His only begotten Son into the world and why Jesus chose to die for our sins.

It wasn’t nails that held Jesus to the cross. It was Jesus love for you that kept him up there on the cross! Jesus had the power to call ten thousand angels to destroy the world and set him free of the cross, but his love for each of us is why he chose to stay. Love is not sex, Love is not romance, Love is not friendship. Love, in the Biblical sense, is so much more!

All good things must come to an end, right? No, absolutely not! Many good things will come to an end. There will come a time when all the prophecies will be fulfilled and then there will be no need of prophecy. There will come a time when we will not need eloquent speech and fancy turns of phrase to communicate the Gospel. There is coming a time when we will know God face to face! At that point all of the fancy religious words, all of the piety, all of the theology and all of the philosophy will mean nothing. It will all seem so silly.

What will be important at that time, will be who you have loved; how much you have loved; and if your love has made a difference in the life of somebody else. You see when that day comes, Love will remain. Because love is the thing that is the basis and purpose for all those other good things. Love is eternal. Prophesies, knowledge, eloquence will all have fulfilled their usefulness and will fall away. but the most essential thing: love will remain.

When it comes to Love, the world is right in part about a few things. Love is a many splendored thing. Love is all you need. Love is truly what makes the world go round. Love is the fifth element of creation. Love is a basic need for humanity.

But the world also has a few things wrong with its ideas on love. Love often means saying you are sorry. When we truly Love others as God would have us to do, and we do things that may have hurt or wronged others, love requires us to apologize, to say we are sorry for our words or actions; to make every effort to repair the damaged relationships we are part of. Love is more, so much more, than a mere physical act. Love goes way beyond flowers and candlelight. Love goes much further than saying nice things and complementing another’s appearance. Love is eternal. Love is essential. You want to know what Love is. Look at Jesus, and especially look at his body broken and his blood shed for us. Jesus is the eternal, unconditional self-sacrificing love of God in the flesh! He is the example we are called to follow.

One day He will return. When that day comes, we will be judged, according to our actions, according to our attitudes during our life here in this world. What did you do with the Love God has given you? Did you hide it away and keep it all to yourself? Or did you share it with those you have encountered. Can I tell you a secret this morning, Agape love is in never ending supply when we live in the presence of Jesus. Love seems to come from a fountain filled with an eternal supply of love, the supply never ends. Love is the one thing you can give away and the more you give away the more love you have; if you haven’t noticed this, I encourage you to give it a try.

Today challenges you to draw closer than you may have ever been to Jesus. I challenge you to draw from His wellspring that never will run dry. Then I challenge you to give it away, give it all away, and see if that is possible, for as I said before, the more you give away the greater the supply you will receive. You cannot outgive God, we have proven this time and time again. Just when you think you are about to run out, God shows up and supplies your needs. So today Love the Lord your God, with all that you have, and then you can love your neighbor in the same way.