

Rev. Dr. Chris Montovino  
1 Corinthians 13:1-13; Romans 12:9-21  
September 22, 2024

## Love

The first of the fruit of the Spirit that is up for us to talk about today is Love. The bible has a lot to say about Love. Jesus specifically commanded us to love not just one another but our enemies as well. This is a message that our country desperately needs to take hold of as we witness such bitterness expressed in partisan politics. But before it can begin with them, it must begin with us. We cannot expect our political adversaries to show love, unless we are willing to love them first.

I'm going to be reading from two scriptures today. The first from 1 Corinthians 13 verses 1-13 should be very familiar. We hear this at nearly every wedding. The second one is from Paul's letter to the Romans 12:9-21 which may not be so familiar. But both amplify the kind of love that God expects to be produced as fruit by those who call themselves by Jesus' name.

### 1 Corinthians 13:1-13

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. **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.

**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.

**8** 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. **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.

**13** And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

Romans 12:9-21

**9** Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. **10** Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves. **11** Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. **12** Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. **13** Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.

**14** Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. **15** Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. **16** Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.

**17** Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. **18** If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. **19** Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. **20** On the contrary:

"If your enemy is hungry, feed him;  
if he is thirsty, give him something to drink.  
In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head."

**21** Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

It's one thing to read about love. It's entirely another thing to see it lived out through a person's life. While there have been many people during my time at Cascades who have represented Christ's love well, our friend Gordon Zenk comes to mind right now.

Gordon taught me a lot over the twenty years of being his pastor. From his time serving on session, sharing meals in his home with him and Carolyn, or watching him sing in the choir, his gentleness, kindness, patience, and self-control are all evident fruit of his journey with Jesus Christ.

One of the ways that Gordon shaped me was through his unconditional and unpretentious love of marginalized people. Whether it be the homeless person on the street or the LGBTQ+ community in our midst, Gordon is a patient and gentle advocate for the truth that all people regardless of who they are, are worthy of love, respect, and kindness. Now that may not have been Gordon's exact words, but it was definitely his actions.

Author Christopher Wright in *Cultivating the Fruit of the Spirit, Growing in Christlikeness* says, "How do you know if a believer, or a church, is alive? Look for the love. Where there is love, there is life."<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Christopher J. Wright, *Cultivating the Fruit of the Spirit, Growing in Christlikeness* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2017), 27.

In the same way, he also states, “If people claim to be Christians, but their lives, attitudes, and words are filled with hatred of others, then [the Gospel writer] John warns us that they may not even have eternal life at all, no matter what they claim.”<sup>2</sup>

So this morning, I aim to do several things. First we will look at these scriptures more closely from the Apostle Paul so that we can learn what biblical love looks like in contrast to the world’s view of love. Then we will consider what Jesus himself commanded us on the subject. We will learn how we can cultivate love more in our own lives. And finally, we’ll reflect upon what God is saying to us today.

First let’s look more closely at the scriptures from the Apostle Paul that we just heard so that we can learn what biblical love looks like. To the Corinthians, Paul wrote, love is not pretentious or loud, on display for others to take notice of. Instead, it is patient, kind, not envious, not proud, nor rude or self-seeking. Love is not easily angered, keeps no records of wrongs. It does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.

To the Romans, he wrote, love is sincere, devoted to one another, honoring others. Full of zeal, yet under control of the Holy Spirit. Love serves the Lord, is joyful, patient, faithful in prayer. Hospitable. Love blesses others, even those who persecute us. Is not proud, but associates with people of low positions. Love does not seek revenge, but lives at peace with everyone.

Love overcomes evil with good.

So why would Paul need to reframe love for new believers in Corinth and Rome? Because they lived in a culture, like ours today, which had a very low view of love. You see for them, love was temporal, based on how I feel today...fully open to the fact that it could change tomorrow. Love was carnal or of the flesh. Self-seeking. On display for everyone to see like our Instagram posts.

Pagan love paints a very unrealistic picture of what true love is. Like a Hollywood RomCom where two people meet, the stars align, and they instantly fall deeply and madly in lust...until the next morning when they realize that this person they’ve just slept with isn’t quite the person they had imagined from the night before. So they move on. And with each casual romantic encounter, love is cheapened, no longer reflecting the life long commitment God intended for us to share with one other person. And we wonder why most couples on the Bachelor or Bachelorette don’t last? Come on people!

Cosmopolitan writer, Paulina Jayne Isaac wrote about this, in her article, ” Sorry, But I Just Have to Say It: These Iconic Movie Couples Gave Me Unrealistic

---

<sup>2</sup> IBID.

Expectations About Love.” She looked at countless number of Hollywood love stories which met three criteria: "the couples have to be aspirational, the chemistry palpable, and most importantly, the love has to be intense.”

However, the truth is that these are not real love stories at all. They are lust stories. An authentic love story is not built on the glamour of aspiration, the feel of chemistry, and thrill of intensity...[all of which are] experiences that come and go while real love remains.”

My friends, when we tell someone that we love them. It is chock full of promises that we need to be ready to stand behind. If not then we are fooling ourselves and the other person. This is why Jesus warns us to not to take oaths or make promises before we are ready and to “guard our hearts because it is the wellspring of life.”<sup>3</sup>

The tricky thing about Paul’s words about love is that it is a picture of the love experienced within the trinity, Father, Son, and Holy spirit as well as how love God loves us. God’s love is perfect. And though we fall short, time and time again, we are to strive to love one another in the same way. We can’t do it in our own strength, but we can through the power of the Holy Spirit living in us. As we love in this way, we participate in the love flowing from within our triune God.

Notice that love is so important that Jesus commanded us to love God, and to love others as we love ourselves.<sup>4</sup> And that we should love our enemies as well.<sup>5</sup> He even said that we would show ourselves to be his disciples if we loved one another well.<sup>6</sup>

Well I don’t know about you, but I find it extremely easy to love myself. But my weird neighbor? Or my enemy who wishes to do me harm? Or that politician that spews so much hate? That is not so easy. Which is why we must rely more and more on the strength and power of the Holy Spirit to love in this way. As I mentioned last week, as we yield ourselves to the Holy Spirit, it flows through us and reshapes us into the image of Jesus Christ who loved us completely.

The Apostle John wrote in his epistle to the churches, “Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.”

He continues, "Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them.”

“We love because he first loved us. If anyone says, ‘I love God,’ yet hates their brother or is sister, they are a liar. For anyone who does not love their brother

---

<sup>3</sup> Proverbs 4:23

<sup>4</sup> John 15:12-17

<sup>5</sup> Matthew 5:43-44

<sup>6</sup> John 13:34-35

or sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen. And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love their brother or sister.”<sup>7</sup>

So clearly Jesus and his followers agree that love for another another authenticates our life with God. Period.

The question begs, how can we cultivate more love in our lives?

Trask and Goodall in their book *The Fruit of the Spirit* describe three common misunderstandings of love.<sup>8</sup>

The first misunderstanding is that love develops automatically in an unpremeditated way. The truth is that sometimes love is a choice and grows more and more over time. This is why Jesus commanded us to love and the bible speaks often about loving others. It is not natural and needs to be cultivated. This helps us understand that we are each works in progress that are moving toward being more loving.

“In a world full of anger, hate, envy, jealousy, and revenge, we are often influenced to do the same. We must decide every day to be people who are known for how we love.”<sup>9</sup>

A good test to see if we are producing the fruit of love in our lives is to ask, “Are we more loving this year than we were last year, especially toward those we find difficult to love?” If the answer is yes...we are bearing good fruit. If not, then we need to yield ourselves more to the Holy Spirit.

The second misunderstanding is that many people believe that just because they understand the definition of love, they will naturally love. But just as we heard earlier, our culture’s understanding of love and what has been ingrained in us, isn’t the same thing as biblical love. We need to be intentional about learning what true love is.

The more we fill our minds and hearts with Hollywood’s concept of love lust, the more we will buy into ourselves. Conversely, the more we are filled with God’s Word, the more we will reflect God’s love to others.

And the third misunderstanding is that few often grasp their potential to harm others with their words and actions. Sometimes those are intentional and sometimes they are not. But all of us have a sinful nature and the the capacity to be unloving. If we want to know what kinds of policies and administration a politician running for office is going to create, listen to how they treat their

---

<sup>7</sup> 1 John 4:7-8, 16b, 19-21

<sup>8</sup> Thomas E. Trask and Wayde I. Goodall, *The Fruit of the Spirit, Becoming the Person God Wants You to Be* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishing, 2000), 6-

<sup>9</sup> IBID, 8.

opponents. Jesus was very clear, “From the overflow of our hearts, the mouth speaks.”<sup>10</sup>

So what does Jesus suggest we do to love those who we find difficult to love? He said, it’s easy to love those who love us. Pray for those who persecute you. The Greek word used here for persecute comes from *dioko*. It means those who go after us, pursue us, or actively wish to do us harm.

Why would he suggest that? Because the more we pray for someone, the more God changes our hearts toward them. Again, Trask and Goodall say, “We can choose to see through angry, bitter, hateful people’s actions and beyond their words to understand that they are likely wounded and trying to protect themselves.”<sup>11</sup>

And as we are loving others, our love can make a difference. Not only can our prayers melt our hearts, but our actions can melt another’s. People can change by the way we treat them.<sup>12</sup>

So what God is saying to us today?

Is there a parent, a child, or a family member with whom we are struggling too see eye to eye? What if God were inviting us to love them unconditionally in the same way that God loves us?

Is there someone that we despise for whom we need to begin praying? What if God was wanting to change our hearts toward them?

Is there someone who wishes us harm that we need to love in return? Remember, Jesus does not expect us to be Christian doormats. But what if God was calling us to establish more safe boundaries with them so that they cannot continue their abusive behavior? That could be the most loving thing we can do toward them.

Do we need to show someone love that we need to forgive? Do we need to forgive ourselves? We cannot cultivate the fruit of the Spirit of love if we harbor bitterness in our hearts. It poisons the soil of our souls. Makes us toxic. What if God was saying “Forgive as often as I have forgiven you?”

Is there a political opponent that we cannot stand or understand? What if God was inviting us to sit down and listen to their point of view for a change? What if we considered that maybe they have good intentions behind their ideas?

Are we being more influenced by the world’s concept of love than the Bible’s? What if God was calling us to spend more time in his Word than on Netflix?

---

<sup>10</sup> Luke 6:45

<sup>11</sup> Trask and Goodall, *The Fruit of the Spirit*, 20.

<sup>12</sup> IBID, 14.

Are we giving our hearts away too soon? What if God was saying slow down so that we don't get ourselves hurt or unintentionally hurt another?

Are we frustrated that we aren't more loving than we ought to be as followers of Jesus? What if God was reminding us that fruit takes time to grow? But as we take care of the soil and the roots of the tree of our lives, good fruit will grow.

You see God has a lot to say on love.

So may we love others because Jesus first loved us.<sup>13</sup> May we yield ourselves to the power of the Holy Spirit who lives in us. And may others know that we are Jesus' disciples by the way we love others. Amen!

---

<sup>13</sup> 1 John 4:19