

Today I have the privilege of preaching on one of the most preached on texts of all time. It is the center piece of the book we have been exploring and learning from - and one of the most beautiful, soaring, deeply theological texts in the whole Bible. I Corinthians 13. If you'd like to go ahead and open your bibles there that would be awesome. It is a pretty big leap to go from Chapter 7 to Chapter 13, but It's important that we make this jump because this passage really explains the rest of the book.

And, it's a tough passage to preach on because its a profoundly misunderstood and misused passage. If you are like - what passage is it, we are talking about the Love passage - and our definition of love, as we have talked about before, is very tangled up with the culture's definition of love.

Think about how your view of love has been shaped: **Disney** taught us that "True Love's Kiss" fixes everything! How about **RomCom's** that teach us that finding the right person will complete us and make us happy? Movies like Grease taught us that to get love from "the guy" (or gal) we just had to change who we are - our dress, behavior and interests. And that's just the movies! How about your family of origin? What did you learn about love from them? Maybe "love is earned by good behavior," or if you had an experience of abuse, "love is unsafe." Perhaps there was divorce in your home and you learned that "love sometimes ends,." or it's possible that love was absent for you. Love is an emotion - and always feels. Love in every form is always pure and good. Love is easy.

Think about it - you've spent your entire lives immersed in the messages of love from the world and learning what love looks like from your family; how much time have you spent learning what love is from Jesus?

This is what Paul, the author of the book of Corinthians, is going to challenge the church on in the passage. He wants to untangle their definition of love and challenge them to grow up into love - love like the love of the Father that Heidi shared with us last week (wasn't that a great message! If you were not here, you might want to check that one out one the web site).

We are making a jump from chapter 7 to chapter 13, but, I think that doing this will help us better understand what Paul teaches in those in-between chapters. But, let's do a quick fly over of what's covered there. Remember Paul's goal is to untangle their culture from their faith. As a Spiritual father his is calling them up through correction and then answering their questions. The first question was about sex and sexuality - that sermon is on line, and if you missed it I highly recommend going to the website and listening. The second question is about food sacrificed to idols - doesn't sound like a problem today, but you might be surprised, because his answer has to do with loving people in different circumstances!

Then comes a question about Spiritual Gifts - Where do they fit into the church; what role do they play in our worship services? And, what is the most important spiritual gift to have - and how can I get it? What about tongues, and words of knowledge, and miracles - or people who claim to have "special knowledge."

That is such a good question! And you are like - yea! Why are we not talking about that? I mean, what is the most important gift in the church and how *can* I get it? And what about people who claim to have "special knowledge" from God? Is the latest theological thinking always right? Or is it always wrong? Spiritual gifts and new spiritual understandings have and can be very divisive. So how do we navigate that?

In today's text, Paul really covers all the questions with an over arching principal; it is a totally different approach to Spiritual Gifts and knowledge and it also teaches us how to live toward people that think differently than us. Chapters 8-12 cover a lot of practical specifics, but chapter 13 is the guiding principal.

Let me read you the center piece of his answer to them: after talking about unity, one body with many parts, and teaching about the different types of gifts, he says this, starting in chapter 12 verse 30 {READ THE TEXT}

So - Paul answers their question about spiritual gifts with what seems like a totally unrelated subject - the way Love. And in the middle of that he drops this bomb. **“Grow Up!”** *“For we know (have special knowledge) in part and we prophesy in part (we only see some of what God is up to) but when the perfect comes the partial will pass away. When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways.”* The Corinthians were concerned about which gift was superior - Paul wants them to focus on growing up in their faith. Grow up and learn to love God well, love yourself well and out of that love other people well. It's really an extension of Jesus' teaching about the greatest commandment - Love **God** with everything. Love your **neighbor** as **yourself**.

Instead of a spiritual pecking order, instead of being divided from one another by our gifts or understandings of scripture - Paul wants us to pursue the greatest spiritual gift - the most excellent way - Love. But, he does know that this isn't instantaneous thing. That is why Paul uses the imagery of a child growing up - because it is a process. Just like we are born without the skills to feed or dress ourselves, we are not naturally born into the new family of Jesus knowing how to love God, ourselves or others very well. Love is something that the Spirit puts in us when we come to faith - we experience God's love (the love of the Father) and we are given love for others - but, we have to learn to live in ways that are consistent with that love. We grow into it.

So the question becomes - **how do we measure maturity?** How do we know who is grown up? And for Paul the answer is not “do they give, serve or speak in tongues?” Shockingly it's not even “would they willingly be burned at the stake for their faith?” Rather the measure of maturity is their love - does their love for God, themselves and others look like the love of the Father? It is easy to measure spiritual maturity by externals - They raise their hands, they serve on prayer team, they take the offering, teach Sunday School or even preach great sermons!: But Paul says - look, you can do all the right things on the outside, you can speak in tongues and prophesy - but, if love isn't on the inside, if your actions are not motivated and shaped by God's love - It's not mature, it is just empty noise.

Listen, when it comes to our spirituality, it is easy to get into the game of comparisons and even easier to feel 'less spiritual' than someone else. We get bogged down in faith and upset at God because we haven't received the same gift as someone else or experienced something that others have. That's why Paul calls us to seek the higher gifts, and then reveals the greatest gift of all is the gift of love. God's love changes the equation; We all want to be gifted and to use that gift - but **when the Love of the Father is growing in us - we become a gift to the world.**

With the rest of our time this morning, I want to take a look - with new eyes - at how Paul describes Love in this text. I know you've probably read it before - many times. You've heard it at funerals and at weddings. Let's read it together: *“Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.”*

I'm going to read verses 4-7 again, and as I go I'm going to give flesh to these words. And as I do, I invite you to think a little bit about these words - because they are the measurement of maturity in the new family of Jesus. Let's look down at verse 4.

**Love is Patient** - Who is it patient with? In the context of gifts - it's patient with itself as it grows, and patient with others as they grow and mature. (Patient with yourself and with others) - God is patient. Patience is a VERB! To suffer long, to persevere - to stick with it and with each other. What Paul is getting at here is that when we have the love of the father, we are patient with the process of Growing into the new family of Jesus. We don't rush things in ourselves or with others. The work of God in us is like good BBQ - it's low and slow, and when we are filled by the Holy Spirit with God's love we are patient with the process.

John Ortberg is an author and pastor at one of the fastest growing church in the united states - It was a busy time - he was consumed by writing sermons and helping people. He was doing amazing things for God, people were coming to faith, but he felt like he was dying spiritually. So, he called his mentor, Dallas Willard and told him how he was filling. After a long pause, Dallas offered this: **"You must ruthlessly eliminate hurry from your life."** Ok, i've got that written down - what else, John replied. "Nothing. You must ruthlessly eliminate hurry from your life." Love for God is patient - it waits on God, trusts His timing. Healthy Love for ourselves is patient - it allows time and God's Spirit in us to do it's work and transform us into who we so desperately want to be. Love for others is patient - it takes the long view and knows that people grow slowly and that hurrying short changes the work of Jesus in them. Hurry stifles love.

**Love Is Kind** - Kindness is not just being 'nice.' Our culture is obsessed with 'nice.' The greek word behind 'kindness' is the same word we get 'to cherish.' It means to be 'full of service for others.' Love is quick to take care for others physically and spiritually and to react to others with goodness. Kindness shows up in our relationships with one another - how we treat those right around us, and maybe most especially those closest to us - especially those who have been hurt or who hurt us.

Now Paul switches to the negative - what love is not like. For starters, **love is not envious.** That means it is not eager to possess what someone else has - like spiritual gifts, the position God has placed someone in life or work. This isn't just about possessions, though they certainly come into play - it's about being envious of someone else' lot in life and faith. Listen, God has placed each and every one of us in a unique context, at this unique time in history with a unique purpose. That is part of his love for us - this unique calling in life. When God fills us with his love - we focus on our unique calling and on growing up in the new family of Jesus rather than wishing we had someone else unique calling. I kid sometimes that I wish God had called me to a Health/ Wealth gospel ministry where I could get a jet - but, honestly - while it is sometimes hard, I love where God has placed me for this time - this moment, to bring this message to you today.

**Love is Not Boastful** - Boasting, or showing off, is the result of a need for attention. When the love of the Father is in us, it points back to the father not to itself. You might be saying - I'm not a show off - and that might be true, but, boastfulness is not just an action but a motivation for our actions. Paul is looking deep into our hearts here and saying, it's not just what you do but why you do it that matters. Love uses its gifts for the sake of others - but, sometimes we use our gifts to be seen and valued. **Love refuses to live in pretense**, to put a show on for others as a means of increasing public opinion. Love looks like a person who is the same in private as they are on stage. The need to be noticed and to feel like we are making a difference is deeply rooted in our culture. When we experience the love of the father, over time, our need to be seen by others diminishes because we realize that God's gaze is on us and it's the only thing that matters.

**Love is Not arrogant** - Arrogance is a puffed up sense of ego- exaggerates the sense of its own importance. Again - you may not feel arrogant, but if you have ever thought - they couldn't do it without me, that is not love but rather arrogance. I don't typically think of myself as arrogant, but I do have a tendency to over function at work. If you want it done right - do it yourself! When we went on Sabbatical a few years ago, this was one of the first things I had to face - will the church survive without me? I mean - God has gifted me for certain things, and If I'm not doing them... That is why Sabbath has become so important for me - its a day that I stop and say, alright God my hands are totally off the wheel today, you are in charge. And the longer I've done this, the more I've realized that my hands aren't really on the wheel at all - I'm just taking part in the journey, I'm just doing my small part in God's big plan.

**Love is Not rude** - Being rude means being offensive or impolite in manners. Does not act improperly, out of turn, out of bounds. Love understands its place in the body of Christ - its not a hand trying to be a foot. It doesn't look down on the other gifts as inferior but instead it builds others up. And, love **doesn't not insist on its own way** (this is about looking out for itself... often we will use 'giving up what we want' as a way to manipulate our way into something else... Knowing what we want - dying to self while not even know what self we have to dye to!)

**It is not irritable or resentful** - Ok... if there is a test on love and irritable or resentful is on the list, then we all fail this at one time or another! This has more to do with resenting what others have, resenting others gifts.

**Love It keeps no record of wrongs... Now** - this is a little weird. The phrase doesn't appear in the ESV version of the Bible - but it is in the greek. I really have no idea why, and it's the first time I've come across something like this. And, I think it is an important part of what love looks like. Love does not stuff things. There is no elephants in the room. Sometimes we think being kind is not saying what we think - not saying when we have been hurt or speaking our opinion even if it's in opposition to others. When we do this we have a tendency to build up resentment over the wrongs we have suffered along the way. As we grow up in God's love we learn to speak what's on our mind in a kind way, and learn to navigate our disagreements with love. We don't leave things unsaid because we know that resentment and unspoken hurts will only serve to divide the family of Jesus.

**Love does not rejoice at wrongdoing but rejoices with truth.** In our culture, many live by the credo - "If your happy, I'm happy - and, as long as no one gets hurt, do what makes you happy. It is culturally expected that we will 'rejoice' when others are happy even if their happiness is at the cost of their health, or someone else well being. That is not love because it is not looking out for the best for each other. And, don't forget that love is aimed not just at others, but at God and at ourselves. (Skimming on the truth so that you appear more mature, gifted, than you are)

Now Paul is going to rapidly shift back to what love does... **Love bears** (is able to endure because it is under the Lords protection **all things** (each and every thing).

**Believes** - belief is born of faith and built by trials and hard stuff. Here is the thing - lots of people face challenges in their faith, they face waiting, they face not growing as fast as they'd like or not experiencing God in the way they want. Or they face stuff in their relationships that feel impossible. The love that God puts inside of us causes us to believe in the face of doubt, believe in the face of waiting or even emotional pain. Love presses in instead of running away.

**Love hopes** - that means that Love actively waits for God's to fulfill his promises and the faith that he has birthed in you through the power of the spirit and it is willing to wait through **all things**,

**endures** (gets behind and waits - get's behind Jesus and waits...) **through** all things. Endurance literally means "to wait behind something" - in this case, it is referring to patiently waiting for God to work out what he needs to work out in us and around us. This is about not rushing ahead of God and making things happen but persevering even when you are not sure of an outcome.

This is a lot of big stuff - we could do a sermon on each one, but my hope for you today is that Jesus brought to attention a place where you need to grow up in Loving like the Father. I want you to know that there is a mystery in this: In the work to be done in you God has a part, and you and I have a part. In faith, God is never opposed to our efforts to grow - he is only opposed to our attempts to earn Love. So, I challenge you to press in, to become more aware of how well you really love, to grow in love and become a gift to the world!

Lets take a minute to reflect this morning: Of the characteristics of love listed here in I Corinthians 13, which one do you most need to grow in during this season of your life? [MINUTE OF SILENCE]

Closing:

- Offer Love Exam..
- Give grace to yourself and each other. Perspective of a child - this is taking forever! I'll never grow up! Perspective of the father - Kids grow up so fast!