

**Pastor Jim Lloyd**

**Date: October 29, 2023**

**Title: THE GREATEST OF THESE**

**Text: 1 Corinthians 13:1-13**

I had planned to share from the early portion of chapter 11 this week, but for 2 reasons I've decided not to. Length of hair and women's head coverings didn't seem to transition particularly well into communion. To be honest, I could use a bit more study on this challenging portion of scripture. So, I've jumped ahead to 1 Corinthians 13 to what is often called "The Love Chapter." Here we see a grand description of love that best illustrates God's love, as well as is a description of love that we should aspire to.

Whereas in English we have one word to express all kinds of love, in Greek there are 4 different words for love. (I'll take the liberty to combine 2 into 1.) **EROS** refers to physical or sexual love. It was commonly used in the Greek-speaking world of the New Testament times. The word itself I believe is absent in the pages of the New Testament. However, the concept of physical love, expressed in the context of marriage is found and affirmed in the New Testament (1 Corinthians 7:5; Hebrews 13:4). **PHILOS** means warm affection or friendship. Philos was commonly used with reference to friendships or family relationships. In Matthew 10 – love for father and mother, son, or daughter. Philos was the word used for Jesus' love for his friend Lazarus. A related word, **STORGE**, means "family devotion." It is not a common word in the New Testament. In Romans 12:10 it is compounded with philos and can be translated "devoted" (NASB) or "brotherly affection" (ESV). **AGAPE** is the sacrificial, unconditional love of God. In the New Testament, AGAPE is the highest form of love. Outside of the New Testament the word was rarely used. AGAPE is the word that describes God's love in John 3:16 – "God so LOVED the world..." AGAPE is the word for love used in 1 Corinthians 13.

God is particularly good to His people. He has given us more than we ever deserved. He has provided a means of salvation that will save the vilest sinner. He has given us so many precious promises. Hebrews 13:5 – He will never leave us or forsake us. Philippians 4:19 – He'll meet all of our needs according to His riches in glory. John 10:28 – The promise of eternal life. 1 Corinthians 12 informs us that when a person is saved, they are given spiritual gifts so that God can use them in His kingdom work (vs 7). Much more could be said about this matter, but I think it is plain to see that God has been good to us! Apart from Jesus, love is the greatest gift given to His people. The love of God for His people is EVERLASTING – Jeremiah 31:3. His love is what motivated Him to send Jesus to die on the cross – John 3:16. In fact, the greatest evidence of the love of God is the death of Christ on the cross – Romans 5:8. What an incredible gift God has given us in His love!

Now, He did not stop by just giving His love TO us, He has also placed His love IN us. Jesus said that the world would know we were His disciples BY THE LOVE WE HAVE FOR ONE ANOTHER – John 13:35. When Paul listed the Fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23), LOVE is the first characteristic mentioned. Not only does He love us, and pour into us... His love is meant to pour out of us.

Here was one of the primary problems with the church in Corinth for whom this letter was written. They were manifesting every other spiritual gift in existence, but they were lacking in manifesting love to one another. You see, chapters 12-14 cannot be divorced one from the other. The call to love is a call to Christlikeness and maturity in the midst of childishness and fleshly living. Paul writes these great words to remind the Corinthians that of all the great spiritual things they can do, the greatest spiritual exercise is love. Paul writes these words to remind us that it may appear that we possess all kinds of spiritual gifts and abilities, but that we are never more like the Lord Jesus Christ than when WE LOVE THE RIGHT WAY. Now, with all that in mind, let's look at 1 Corinthians chapter 13 and see what God intends Christian love to look like.

**1. First, we note the PRIMACY or IMPORTANCE of Love (v. 1-3).** The whole idea of these verses is that LOVE is superior to everything else we can be or do! **A. It is Superior to the SENSATIONAL (v. 1).** *"Though I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am become as sounding brass or a clanging cymbal."* You may be a great speaker, but that is no substitute for love. No matter how great your oratory, how

beautiful your speech, how brilliant your rhetoric, without love you are simply a clanging cymbal. Anyone ever hear a cymbal solo? (Here Pastor Jim used a drum stick and played the cymbals.) I can assure you it is not very exciting. No matter what you say, nor how you say it, nor how accurate it may be, WITHOUT LOVE IT IS JUST NOISE. Without love, talk truly is cheap. You see, great ORATORY can move a person's EMOTIONS. Great RHETORIC can move a person's MIND. A great SPEECH can move a person's WILL, but... ONLY GREAT LOVE can move a person's HEART. Oratory might move one to tears, but it's love that can move one to Jesus. **B. It is Superior to the SPECTACULAR (v. 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 have not love, I am nothing."* This verse mentions several spectacular abilities – prophecy, understanding of mysteries and all knowledge, and even faith – BUT... Even if a person was able to do all of these things and he did not have the love of God in his heart, he is nothing! **C. It is Superior to the SACRIFICIAL (v. 3).** *"If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing."* You can give away everything you own. You can even give up your body on the altar of martyrdom, but if you do so without love in your heart, it is a waste of time and it does not profit you one bit. The emphasis is clear. WHEN LOVE IS ABSENT, the Christian is no better than a heathen (v. 1). He is nothing (v. 2). He can expect nothing (v. 3). Regardless of what others may think of our abilities and our gifts, WITHOUT LOVE, it is ALL NOISE and a waste of time!

**2. The PORTRAIT of Love (v. 4-12).** In these verses, Paul gives an in-depth description of love. He reveals all of its characteristics to us. These are truths that we need to be reminded of continually. **A. Love's PROPERTIES (v. 4-6).** Paul shows us the many sides of true, godly love. As if love were a great and brilliant diamond, he holds it up before us and reveals its many facets. As he does, the Person of God is revealed in each gleam of light from the surface of love. LOVE... **1. Suffereth Long (v. 4)** – This word means "patient endurance under provocation." The literal meaning of the word is "long tempered". This characteristic of love reveals the truth that love does not retaliate. Stephen is an example of this type of love – Acts 7:54-60. *"And falling to his knees he cried out with a loud voice, 'Lord, do not hold this sin against them...'"* (v. 60). He forgave those who were stoning him to death. The greatest example is that of the Lord Jesus – Luke 23:34 – *"Father forgive them for they know not what they are doing."* He forgave those who were crucifying Him. Isaiah 53:7 – *"He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth..."* This kind of love endures all attacks. ILLUSTRATION: One of Abraham Lincoln's most outspoken political enemies was a man names Edwin J. Stanton. Stanton called Lincoln a "low cunning clown" and the "original gorilla." He went so far as to say this, "It is ridiculous for people to go to Africa to see a gorilla, when they could find one easily in Springfield, Illinois." To Lincoln's credit, he NEVER responded to those insults. Yet, when he was elected President, Lincoln chose Stanton to be his Secretary of War. When asked why, Lincoln said, "Because he is the best man!" Later, when Lincoln has been assassinated, Stanton stood by the coffin which contained Lincoln's body and said through is tears, "There lies the greatest ruler of men the world has ever seen." Lincoln's patient (undeserved) love won Stanton over in the end. **2. Is Kind (v. 4).** This word refers to active goodness that goes forth in behalf of others. Genuine love is never hateful or mean, but it respects others and reaches out to them. The supreme example of this kind of love is God. He is kind to people despite their treatment of Him. Romans 2:4 – *"Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?"* **3. Envieth Not (v. 4).** True love is not jealous over the abilities or possessions of another. Instead of being jealous when others prosper or excel, love is pleased when they do well. Jealousy is one of the vilest of sins that we harbor in our hearts! It was Eve's jealousy of God that motivated her to take the forbidden fruit. It was jealousy that put Daniel in the lion's den. It was jealousy that put Joseph in the pit! Yet, Godly love does not get jealous, rather it is pleased when others do well. **4. Vaunteth Not Itself (v. 4).** Literally, this phrase means "does not make a parade." Love does not brag. It does not draw attention to itself or to what it is doing. A person who must always be the center of attention and is hurt when he is not, is not walking in love! **5. Is Not Puffed Up (v. 4).** Love is not arrogant or proud, but it realizes that all it has and all that it is has been given by God. No matter how great our talents or how spectacular our gifts, everything we are is the result of divine grace. **6. Does Not Behave Itself Unseemly**

**(v. 5).** Love is never rude, but it always treats others with compassion, consideration, and respect. Love controls the emotions. It is not friendly one day and rude the next. Genuine love ALWAYS makes Jesus look good! **7. Seeketh Not Her Own (v. 5).** True love is never selfish and self-centered, but it is actively interested in what will benefit others. It never looks at itself first, but it always considers another ahead of itself. Jesus is the prime example of this attitude in action. Matthew 20:28 – *“Jesus didn’t come to be ministered to, but to give his life a ransom for many.”* Luke 22:42 – *“Not my will but thine be done.”* This is how each of us is to be, Philippians 2:3 – *“Let each esteem others better than themselves.”* **8. Is Not Easily Provoked (v. 5).** JOKE – A husband and wife had been married for 60 years and supposedly had no secrets except for one. The woman kept in her closet a shoe box that she forbade her husband from ever opening. When she was on her deathbed, and with her blessing, her husband opened the box and found a crocheted doll and \$95,000 in cash. “My mother told me that the secret to a happy marriage was to never argue,” she explained. “Instead, I should keep quiet and crochet a doll.” Her husband was touched. Only one doll was in that box. That meant she’d been angry with him only ONCE in 60 years! “But what about all this money?” he asked. “Oh,” she said, “that’s the money I made from selling the dolls.” True love keeps no record of evils done to it, but it willingly endures all slights and injuries. This characteristic of love reminds us that love does not demand its own rights. It is willing to yield to the will of another. True love only responds in anger to that which angers God. All other things are handled through forgiveness. Ephesians 4:26-32 – <sup>26</sup>*“Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger,* <sup>27</sup>*and give no opportunity to the devil... <sup>29</sup>Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear. <sup>30</sup>And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. <sup>31</sup>Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. <sup>32</sup>Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.”* **9. Thinketh No Evil (v. 5).** Literally, this phrase means “takes no worthless inventory.” Two thoughts are in mind here. First, genuine love does not attribute evil motives to people. That is, every action is not seen in its most negative light. It thinks the best of others. Second, genuine love does not keep a record of evils done to it. In other words, it does not dwell on what others may have done. Often what we think happened did not even take place anyway. MANY of our hurts are PERCEIVED hurts. We just think it happened that way. That is why we must learn to treat others like the Lord treats us. We must treat them with GRACE and FORGIVENESS. Real love does NOT: Remember injury, believe all it hears about another, or look for fault in others! If this attitude were practiced in the church, it would solve about 90% of any church’s troubles. **10. Rejoiceth NOT in Iniquity (v. 6).** Love does not rejoice in sin. Whether it is its own sins, or the sin of others. LOVE HATES SIN! Love does not rejoice when another falls into sin! Whether we will admit it or not, there is sometimes a part of us that is glad when another (believer) falls because we think it makes us look better. That is why we just have to tell someone else about it. True love does not gossip or rejoice when another believer falls, but it hurts with the injured member. **11. Rejoiceth in the Truth (v. 6).** While love hates all forms of evil, it LOVES THE TRUTH! It rejoices when truth is proclaimed and when truth wins the victory. Love is glad for the truth, even when the truth hurts. Love is glad when truth wins the day! Do these things describe your life this morning? If you are walking in love, they do! **B. Love’s PERSISTENCE (v. 7-12).** These verses tell us of love’s staying power. Love is a remarkable thing that NEVER FAILS! **1. Beareth All Things (v. 7).** Love patiently endures and overlooks the faults in others. The word “beareth” literally means “to cover.” Instead of parading the failures and faults of others before all the world, love covers them over and continues to love in spite of those things. This was the example of God and His Son Jesus – Romans 5:8, *“God commendeth his love toward us, in that while we were sinners he died for us.”* (Also see Isaiah 53:4-5). This was Peter’s testimony – 1 Peter 4:8, *“Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since LOVE COVERS A MULTITUDE OF SINS.”* ILLUSTRATION: An example of this kind of love comes to us from the history of England. During the reign of Oliver Cromwell, a soldier had been sentenced to die. His fiancée pleaded with Cromwell to spare his life, but the great ruler refused. The young soldier was to be executed when the curfew bell sounded, but when the bellringer pulled the rope, there was no sound. The girl had climbed into the bell tower and had wrapped her body around the clapper, thus preventing the bell from sounding. Although she was battered and her body bruised and smashed, she

managed to climb down. When she stood before Cromwell and told him what she had done, he immediately commuted (changed) the sentence of the soldier. Love beareth all! **2. Believeth All Things (v. 7).** Love always places the best possible interpretation on everything that happens. It does not always seek the most negative answer, but it believes that good will triumph in any situation. Basically, love trusts, love believes, and love has confidence in the one loved. **3. Hopeth All Things (v. 7).** Love always expects the best possible outcome. Love refuses to accept failure. Love always holds out hope that things will work out right in the end. Many have lost loved ones and many loved ones have backslidden. Love does not give up on them. Love believes the day will come when they will come to God and things will be made right. Love just DOES NOT GIVE UP! **4. Endureth All Things (v. 7).** This is a military term and means that love “does not give up the fort!” It stands its ground and continues in spite of everything that can be thrown against it. It continues in spite of persecution and ill treatment. Love bears the unbearable, believes the impossible, holds on to the incredible, and never gives up. The word stop does not exist in the vocabulary of love. **5. Charity Never Faileth (v. 8-12).** When everything else in this world has passed away. When everything that is held in such high esteem is gone. When knowledge and gifts no longer matter, LOVE WILL STILL EXIST. It is the great constant throughout eternity. There are times when love may lose a battle, in that the object of one’s love may never return that love. Yet, while it may lose a battle here and there, love has already won the war. The idea here is not on success. The idea is endurance. When other things have been removed from view, THERE WILL STILL BE LOVE! It does not give in, give up, or give out. Love that is REAL is LOVE THAT LASTS!

**3. The PREEMINENCE of Love (v. 13).** The Bible says that THREE things abide: FAITH, HOPE, and LOVE. Yet, faith and hope are encompassed inside of love. That is – faith and hope are products of love. Therefore, the greatest of all things a believer can possess is LOVE! If our love is right, then faith is no problem. If our love is right, then our hope is in the right place. When our love is right, then WE ARE RIGHT! What makes love so great? Well, love is the defining characteristic of who God is, 1 John 4:8 – *“He that loveth not knoweth not God; for GOD IS LOVE.”* When the Bible wanted to describe God in one sentence, it said, “GOD IS LOVE.” God does not have faith. After all, who would God place His faith in? God does not have hope. What would One Who controls everything possible have to hope for? Yet, God IS LOVE! Therefore, we are never more God-like than when we have learned to love like God. To be like God, we need to learn to love like God. When we can do that, our world will be altered for His glory!

**CONCLUSION.** There was a man who only had an eighth-grade education. But this man wanted to be a soul-winner. God had laid a brilliant attorney on his heart. Obeying what he thought to be the voice of the Lord, he went to talk to the lawyer about Jesus Christ, but no sooner had he begun when the attorney used his legal training and brilliant mind to turn the man inside out. The man finally apologized for coming and for taking the attorney’s time. He left with tears in his eyes as he said to the lawyer, “I just want you to know that I came because I love you.” Dejected, he went home to his wife and said, “I don’t want to be bothered. I don’t want to talk to anyone the rest of the day. I just want to go to my room and be left alone; I feel like such a failure.” About an hour later, the lawyer came and knocked on the man’s door. He told the man’s wife he would like to see her husband. She said, “I’m sorry, but he is not seeing anyone today.” “Oh,” he said, “I think he will see me. Just tell him who I am.” So, the husband allowed the attorney to come into his room. He said, “Why have you come? Have you come to make fun of me? Have you come to argue with me again? You know I cannot argue with you.” The lawyer said, “No, I haven’t come to argue with you. I have come to ask you to tell me how to be saved.” The man replied, “I don’t understand. What changed your mind? Every time I tried to tell you about Jesus you came up with an argument that I couldn’t answer.” The lawyer said, “Yes, I did. But you came up with an argument that I couldn’t answer.” This soul-winner looked at him and said, “What was that?” The lawyer replied, “When you looked at me and told me you loved me, I couldn’t argue with that.” NOTHING will win the victory over others and over circumstances like love! It is love that makes the difference. This morning, I ask you to take every other thing you hold in great value and lay it aside. That is, forgetting about your talents, and your gifts, and your potential, and your positions, and anything else that might come to mind, and answer the question – HOW IS YOUR LOVE LIFE? Do you LOVE LIKE GOD? Did this chapter leave you

with the feeling that you were LOVING THE RIGHT WAY? Or did you get the feeling that there was room for improvement? We need to learn to love like Jesus so we can reach our world and so that we can have the right kind of atmosphere in His House. How is your love life this morning? Of course, if you aren't saved, you must take that first step before you can ever hope to love like God. That is – You must be SAVED BY HIM before you can LOVE LIKE HIM. While every head is bowed and every eye closed, I can't think of a better moment to reach out to Christ with YOUR LOVE for the love that He has extended to you.