

"God's Above and Beyond Love"

1 Corinthians 12:31-13:13

We live in a crazy world these days. We've created a world where people are hyper-sensitive about terms used to describe gender, ethnicity and we're not even allowed to have personal preferences or opinions fearing we will be labelled as a hater of something. The words 'hate' and 'love' have been redefined in our culture. The term 'hate' still carries the definition in the dictionary as 'intense hostility; or extreme dislike or disgust'. Yet our society, thanks to politics and social media, have redefined hatred as simply as disagreeing with another's opinion. Especially the government's opinion.

And its opposite term 'love' has equally been redefined. One of the definitions of love still found in dictionary is an unselfish loyal and benevolent concern for the good of another: such as : the fatherly concern of God for humankind

However, for many people love is whatever you want it to be. It is self-defined, which is really not defined. So then who determines what hate and love mean, especially love? These terms are rooted in Scripture and since God is the author of Scripture (and Creator of the world) He defines what love is. While many people can show at times unselfish, loyal benevolent concern for the good of another, for most people the "another" they want to show concern for is limited. I.E. to those who do the same to them.

But God has a deeper definition of love and expects us who believe Him and His Son Jesus to love as He does. To have a 'Things above' love instead of just a 'things below' love that the world practices. Jesus Himself said in Matt. 5 that even tax-collectors love those who love them back. So, what sets us apart from the world? And how does God's love change the way we love our spouses, families, fellow believers and those who don't know Jesus?

Because if we have accepted Jesus as our Saviour, we are to follow Him and obey his Word. Jesus told His own disciples the night before He died to

Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. ³⁵ By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

Jesus taught the disciples how to love the way He loves, not the way the world loves. A 'Things Above' type love, much different than the things on earth type love. As we come to the most well known portion of Scripture about love – we often use it at weddings – we are reminded how we're to love the way God loves us. Ironically, this was an aside to Paul's teaching on how to use spiritual gifts, because the Corinthian Christians were not acting very loving to one another. They were divided over their favourite Bible teachers, over who baptized them, over what they could or could not eat but mostly divided over the use (or abuse?) of spiritual gifts. They were enamored with the sign gifts; tongues, prophecy, miracles, knowledge – to the point where they felt they were more mature if they had one of these gifts. Which, is the exact opposite of what spiritual maturity and loving like Jesus are.

So after Paul explains the purpose for every spiritual gift (Ch. 12) he ends the chapter reminding them that everyone has different gifts but that they should desire the greater gifts; which here he defines as faith, hope and love; love being the greatest gift you can give to others. The more excellent way. Why? Because their way wasn't working. So, Paul tells them through illustrations,

Giftedness Without Love is Meaningless **(13:1-3)**

In the Greek language there are very specific ways of using the term “if” in what’s called a conditional clause. In this case we know Paul means ‘if I had these things (which I currently do not) but if I did, then this is what would result.

If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not 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 have not love, I am nothing. 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 be the most spiritually gifted follower of Jesus but if you take pride in your gifts you will use them to exalt yourself and not love others. Even I could speak angel speak, if I lack a loving spirit I’m just noise. If I had the most spiritual knowledge through the gifts but use them unlovingly I am nothing. And even if I were to make the most spiritual sacrifice; a large gift, be a martyr; I have not grown spiritually.

So what are the gifts of the Spirit for?

We’re gifted so we’ll serve like Jesus (Phil. 2:5-11)

Paul summarized Jesus’ selfless and sacrificial spirit in Phil. 2:5-8, by which he prefaces with,

⁵ *Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:*

⁶ *Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,*

⁷ *but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.*

⁸ *And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to death— even death on a cross!*

Why did He do all that? Out of love for the world; even those who would not accept Him. Even for us who accept Him but often take Him for granted and wrongly think His gifts should serve our purposes.

Ps. 115:1 Not to us, O LORD, not to us but to your name be the glory, because of your love and faithfulness.

The Corinthians had the gifts but not the love. And so saw their gifts as ways of exalting themselves. No, says Paul. You’re forgetting why Jesus came and what Jesus wants from you. To love one another selflessly and sacrificially. The reason why no one has all the gifts, he pointed out in Ch. 12 is

We’re gifted differently so we’ll work together (1 Cor. 12:4-11, 27)

⁴ *There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. ⁵ There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. ⁶ There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men. ⁷ Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.*

²⁷ *Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.*

Each one of us is a part of Jesus’ family. And Jesus’ family is to look like they are related to Jesus by loving like Jesus.

Loving Like Jesus Builds Us All Up **(13:4-7)**

The apostle Paul wrote near the beginning of Romans something that he meant for every church he went to:

Rom. 1:11 | long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong—¹² that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith.

When we serve one another with the gifts God has given us we are all built up and encouraged to become more like Jesus. Jesus embodied love. Love (agape) is I will serve you regardless of how you respond to me. Which is how God and Jesus love us. 'For God so loved the world that he gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him will not perish but have everlasting life'. Salvation through faith in the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus was lovingly and sacrificially made for everyone but only the 'whosoever's' gain from it. Yet most reject the gospel.

Paul now gives 15 verbs of what love looks like. Love is predominantly an action more than an emotion. 15 verbs in 3 verses; love is acting out like Jesus. He begins and ends vv.4-7 positively, saying what love looks like and negatively in the middle what love doesn't look like. And not surprisingly we see many similarities with the fruit of the Holy Spirit from Gal. 5:22-23. Especially the first two; love is patient and kind. When we love like Jesus, we

Give evidence of the Spirit's work in our lives (vv.4a, 7b)

To love like Jesus is seen in being patient and kind because as you grow spiritually you realize how flawed and sinful we all are. Patience means long-suffering. That means we don't react immediately to harsh words. We don't rush to defend ourselves. We listen before we speak. Especially with those we are closest. If we say we love our spouses, then they should see God's love in our patient and kind treatment of one another.

I remember having a coffee with a pastoral colleague one time and he was telling me about one of the many times when he and his wife were having 'one of those typical yelling and screaming' arguments, as if it was normal, marital Christian behaviour. And it sounded like it was a normal part of their marriage. I don't think either believer is showing any fruit of the Spirit. Jesus' like love is patient because it tolerates one's shortcomings (i.e. sinful bent). Love is kind because it treats others as God does; with compassion and respect. As Christian spouses and parents we need to model this most right in our homes. To recognize all of us still struggle with sin and kids grow up having to learn that their misbehaviour is a result of their sin nature. We want them to show God's kindness and compassion to us, so we should to them also. That's the 'Things Above' approach to relationships. To love them like Jesus because all that we have in Christ is grace and we're shown so much grace by God, we need to show it ourselves to show that the Spirit is producing His fruit in us.

In v.7 Paul says Jesus' love bears, believes, endures and hopes in "all things". Four times "all things" is mentioned. So, if you were thinking for a moment in your mind 'Yeah but you don't know what I have to put up with' at home, at work, etc., v.7 doesn't give us an excuse does it. "All things".

Paul sandwiches these positive attributes of love with eight things love doesn't do. Love doesn't copy the way the world acts. The unsaved, unrepentant sinner lives for himself/herself. Whereas

Jesus' love helps others at our expense (vv.4b-7a)

It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. ⁵ It is not rude, 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.

Envy, boasting and pride are self-exalting. Rudeness is meant to strangely impress people with your wit. Keeping records of wrongs done to you means you have placed yourself at life's center. Everyone is wrong, I am right.

But choosing not to boast about self means not talking and letting someone else get some attention. If you want to make your spouse, child, friend feel valued, listen to them without interrupting. Love is not easily angered. Again, patience. Anger is usually aroused because something didn't happen for us that we wanted it to. Life is not about any of us. It's about glorifying God. Letting go of hurts is most Jesus like who died for every time we have hurt Him and will hurt Him because of our sin. Love rejoices when someone else gets the attention/promotion/blessing and doesn't enjoy seeing someone we maybe don't like, receive bad news or a hurt or setback. Even in marriages I've witnessed a husband or wife say, 'Well, since you got this I'm going to get that.' It's not a contest. Rejoice in each other's blessings. Even better, be a blessing to someone else.

Biblical love means sacrificing our resources, time and even words to show others (those closest to you or those who don't know Jesus) how to love others like God and Jesus love us; above the world's ways; above and beyond what the world expects.

Paul transitions back to the spiritual gifts in vv.8-13 and basically says, gifts are wonderful but one day when the perfect comes (Jesus' return and eternity) there will be no need for these gifts. But love, hope and faith will always be with us. So when we

Love Like Jesus it Renews our Future Hope (13:8-13)

How?

Spiritual gifts used in love are 'proof' that Jesus came (vv.8-11)

The only reason we have spiritual gifts is because we Have the Spirit dwelling in us since Jesus went back to His father. Which is proof that Jesus came and was real and died and rose again. Much of the world doesn't believe in the deity and significance of Jesus. If Jesus isn't who he said He was and didn't do what He did than we have no hope. Our faith is a farce and loving like Jesus is a waste of time. But if Jesus is the real deal, when we obey His Word and love others selflessly through the power of the Holy Spirit the world sees this and wants to know how we can do this. Because they don't. Why? Because they don't believe in Jesus.

A few weeks ago I was helping a neighbour out and they brought up spirituality. This person believes in many things and in many ways to God, believing they are all legitimate. And I listened and we exchanged views, me telling them what I believe God says in His Word. But I left my neighbour with this challenge and I said, 'Buddha, Mohammed, the Dalli Llama, Gandhi were all good people, but they were just that, people. They didn't die for you nor rise from the dead. Only Jesus did that. And Jesus is more than a person.'

Since the perfect hasn't come (Jesus) people can still see Jesus' life lived through the lives of His followers. As imperfect as we are. But our limitations are God's power and our willingness to love like Him and surrender our 'rights', allowing the Spirit to work through His gifts in us, people will see the difference Jesus can make. And Lord willing place their faith in Him before He returns.

In the meantime, when we selflessly serve one another as Jesus commanded us to,

We get a taste of eternity (vv.12-13)

For now, we can't see the future yet. It's like a polished brass vase that you can see your image but its not very clear (Paul's day). Even now, as clear as our image is in a mirror, a mirror is the image, not the real thing. Faith, hope and love remain forever. When we exercise faith, when we trust in the hope-filled promises of God and when we love selflessly as Jesus commanded us to, we remind ourselves that this is just a sample of what eternity will be like. Living forever in the promised hope, receiving the final reward for our faith and being surrounded by the perfect love of God.

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If you have any comments or questions about this message please contact us
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