

13If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. ²And 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. ³If 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.

⁴Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant ⁵or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; ⁶it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. ⁷It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

⁸Love 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. ⁹For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part; ¹⁰but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end. ¹¹When 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. ¹²For 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. ¹³And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.

I am preaching on 1st Corinthians today.

It is well-loved (no pun intended) and oft used for weddings in particular.

It reminds me of the story of a couple getting married in which the bride, when asked if she took this man for richer or poorer, better or worse, in sickness and in health responded

Well he couldn't get any poorer,
and I've seen him at his worst,
and he has had his sick days...

You know, Pastor, I take him **as is**.

As is.

That is how God takes us.

It is how we are to take each other.

Paul speaks of this in chapter thirteen, tucked between his thoughts on spiritual gifts and speaking in tongues.

This pericope should actually begin at the end of chapter twelve: **And now I will show you a still more excellent way**

And you may ask yourself, than what.?

Paul wrote to the Corinthians to build unity. Corinth was a port town in Greece that was a crossroads by land and sea. It had a little bit of everything and everyone. It had Gnostics, agnostics, charismatics, and so on. We can see many of these divisions in the introduction to 1st Corinthians:

(1 Cor 1:4-11)

[I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus, for in every way you have been enriched in him, in speech and knowledge of every kind— just as the testimony of Christ has been strengthened among you-- so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ. He will also strengthen you to the end, so that you may be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful; by him you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.]

Now I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you be in agreement and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same purpose. For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there are quarrels among you, my brothers and sisters.

Central to what Paul is doing in 1 Cor is trying to tear down those walls that divide and reunite them in Christ

Divisions in the church are nothing new.

*If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, (the Charismatics)
but do not have love,
I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.*

*And if I have prophetic powers, (Apocalyptic sects)
and understand all mysteries (Gnostics)
and all knowledge, (again, Gnosticism)*

and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, (Miracle Workers/faith healers)
but do not have love, ***I am nothing.***

If I give away all my possessions, (Monks)
and if I hand over my body [to be burned], (Martyrs)
but do not have love, ***I gain nothing.***

***You can do everything right, be miraculous to the world
and be nothing in the sight of God.***

NOTHING

If you don't have Love.

So what is Love?

Love is patient;
love is kind;
love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude.

It does not insist on its own way;
it is not irritable or resentful;
it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth.

It bears all things,
believes all things,
hopes all things,
endures all things.

Love never ends.

But *as for all this other stuff you are fighting about*
as for prophecies, they will **come to an end**;
as for tongues, they will **cease**;
as for knowledge, it will **come to an end**.

for we don't know everything
For we know only *in part*,
and we prophesy only *in part*;
but when the complete comes,
(when the fullness comes)

the partial will **come to an end.**

When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child;

but when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways.

We are like children who do not have the experience or framework to understand the whole of God's Love

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

(and we will know fully, in God's time,

when our time on earth is over)

But for now faith, hope, and love abide, these three;

and the *greatest* of these is love.

Paul wrote this to the church, to bring them together in agape type love

The Greek word agape (love) seems to have been virtually a Christian invention -- a new word for a new thing, apart from about twenty occurrences in the Greek version of the Old Testament, it is almost non-existent before the New Testament.

Agape draws its meaning directly from the revelation of God in Christ.

It is not a form of natural affection, however, intense, but a supernatural fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22).

It is a matter of will rather than feeling (for Christians must love even those they dislike -- Matt. 5:44-48).

It is the basic element in Christ-likeness.

In chapter 13 of 1st Corinthians, Paul defines this new kind of love.

Such a passage speaks to all areas of our Christian life, especially those dealing with personal relations as seen in the fact that this is the most used passage for marriage and premarital counseling.

It not only describes the church, which not coincidentally is called the bride of Christ, but marriages and parenting, and friendship, and just getting along with each other.

If I were forced to pick one book of the Bible to explain the faith it would probably be Romans, but if I were to pick one chapter to explain the essence of the faith, the reason for the sacrifice of Christ, the reason God keeps intruding into our lives, time and time and time again, If I were to pick one chapter to fashion my life after, it would be this.

It works for marriages. And families, and any relationship you can think of.

Again,

Love is patient;

love is kind;

love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude.

It does not insist on its own way;

it is not irritable or resentful;

it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth.

It bears all things,

believes all things,

hopes all things,

endures all things.

Love never ends.

If we took these passages seriously, we would be acting out the Gospel.

Christ on the Cross bore all things, all our sins,

believed in the face of death,

hoped that we would all accept forgiveness,

and endured all the pain that death on the cross meant,

all that the humiliation of what led up to it,

all that it meant for the creator to have his creation spurn him,

All THAT he endured, because Love never ends.

The Cross could not kill the Love of Christ, the Tomb could not bury or hold the Love of God in Christ.

And all the divisions in the church, in our lives, in ourselves cannot separate us from the love of God in Christ.
Because Love never ends.

No matter how wretched we are. The author of Amazing Grace was a slave trader before he was saved.

No matter what we have done. The disciples, except for a few women, deserted Jesus and hid out, even denying him in public.

No matter what we have done, we can be redeemed.

But what about our earthly relationships?

The same is true.

Every marriage that has ever been has had moments of unfaithfulness in thought or deed, or anger, or even hatred. Or even worse, selfishness.

I think selfishness is one of the greatest killers of relationships.

Dr. John Gottmann has shown that marriages that have five positive experiences to every bad one will survive. He has a 95% accuracy rate at predicting which couples will be divorced within five years by watching them and just counting positive and negative experiences. He counts words, and actions and grimaces and smiles and glances and everything. It all adds up.

Relationships are work, especially marriages.

Five to one.

That's better than the Army with one aw shucks wipes out twelve attaboys.

And the same holds true with raising and even teaching children.

If they experience five positive to one negative, they will thrive and have a positive self image and self esteem.

Love.

Expressing five loving moments to every selfish one will secure any relationship.

This is not PRETENDING to do or say five loving things to every heartfelt negative thing, although that is a start if you are in the negative, but REALLY doing and meaning five positive loving acts to every negative one. It takes work.

Relationships are like a bank account that needs five positive deposits before you can make one negative withdrawal.

In marriage, we often build up our account during the first years of dating and honeymoon, but often the relationship eventually becomes taken for granted and there get to be more withdrawals than deposits.

This is true often when a couple becomes parents and feels guilty making deposits in the couple account, as if that were taking away from the parent account. ‘
The parent account, set up for the child or children, is a sub account of the couple account.

If you do not make regular deposits in the couple account it may be bankrupt, and all the deposits in the world into the parent account will not bring fiscal security in the end.

Nor will hating your enemies.

Confucius say, when you are angry at your neighbor, walk a mile in his shoes, then you will be a mile away from him, and have his shoes.

(pause)

So in conclusion think of Love.

It is a deposit that is made when you are patient in the face of unthoughtful acts, or stupid actions, or careless words.

It is a deposit that is made when you have a right to be mean and vengeful. but aren't.

When you deposit love in the face of hate or adversity or frustration or disappointment., you are living out your baptism, in which you die to self and live to God.

When you face the world and all it can throw at you and can keep the peace of God within you. That is Love

When you can bless those who persecute you, that is love

When you accept others, even the one you married, as is.

Or accept your parents, as is

Or accept your children, as is.

This is love.

Because the grace of God is that we are loved, as is.