

## Sunday Service Sermons

**14 February 2021**

And the Greatest of These is Love

Valentine's Day is in memory of Saint Valentine who was executed on February 14th in A. D. 470 for performing weddings for Roman soldiers; which was a violation of Roman law at that time. He became the patron saint of beloveds and people around the world celebrate romantic love on this day.

Many sermons have been preached on this day from *1 Corinthians 13*.

Usually focusing on the wedded life or Christ and his love for the Church.

It is not wrong, but is it really what Paul was talking about as he penned this passage?

The book of First Corinthians was the first of two letters which Paul sent to the church in Corinth.

It's purpose was to address several issues which plagued the church.

One was divisions.

Paul dedicated the entire 13th chapter to emphasize the importance of brotherly love because the lack of it is the root cause of divisions.

At the end of chapter 12 Paul said love is the most excellent way!

Thus we do not have to wait for a problem to talk about love.

So today even as we celebrate another Valentine's Day let us see why love is the most excellent way?

(Read *1 Cor. 13: 1-2*).

In our society people often measure the value of a person by their outward appearance, position and wealth.

One might say that doesn't happen in the church.

Truth be told it can for a church is made up of people.

Have you ever asked someone to name a person that they think most likely to be a spiritually mature Christian?

There is a good chance that they will point to a person who has one or more gifts of the spirit.

Spiritual gifts are important and we need them.

But it is wrong and unbiblical to say someone is mature because they have the gifts of the spirit.

Even if one has all the gifts but not love we can't call them a mature believer.

The Christians in Corinth had the gift of tongues.

They spoke in tongues often.

But Paul compared them to spiritual babies because they did not love one another.

"And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, as unto babes in Christ". *3:1*.

Paul mentions the noisy gong and clanging cymbal to suggest spiritual gifts without love make the Corinthians' worship no different from the pagans' for the pagan Corinthians used cymbals to worship Dionysus, the god of wine.

Paul says as a spiritual gift, prophecy is higher than tongues yet still inferior to love.

Also the fruit for the spirit is the outward sign of spiritual maturity and love is the main fruit. See *Gal.5:22-23*.

These clues indicate spiritual gifts are not the signs of spiritual maturity, but loving behavior is.

If a so called child of God doesn't have love, it means they are spiritually immature.

Fortunately we do not have to produce this fruit on our own.

We need to cooperate with the Holy Spirit by doing God's will.

When we do the Spirit himself will produce the fruit within us.

(Read 1 Cor. 13:3)

Paul is not saying self-sacrifice is a fruitless deed.

He is saying self-sacrifice is useless if not driven by love.

The New English Translation uses two key words in its translation for this verse which makes the text much more understandable.

"If I give away everything I own, and if I give over my body in order to boast, but do not have love, I receive no benefit."

The phrase "in order to boast" implies self-sacrifice motivated by reasons other than love.

For instance a businessman can spend a fortune on charitable projects not because he cares for the underprivileged but to be relieved from taxes.

A religious fanatic may blow up himself in the name of martyrdom definitely not because of love but to promote a selfish cause.

Paul says such self-centered sacrifices are of no benefit.

Then there should be some benefit to us when our sacrifice truly concerns the other person's welfare.

What is the reward?

The answer is in *Luke 10:25-28*.

One must love God with all they are and their neighbor as themselves.

But you can't inherit the kingdom of God if you hate your neighbor because hating the neighbor is the same as hating God.

It is impossible to inherit eternal life unless our devotion to God is backed by our love for others.

Because love is the outer manifestation of inner righteousness. *1 Cor. 16:1*

(Read 1 Cor. 13:4-7)

In English the word love is used to describe at least four types of love relationships.

The love between members of a family, or between friends, or the romantic love between a man and a woman, then there is the relationship between Christ and his church.

The Greek language has a different word for these different types of love.

Storage: the relationship between the members of a family.

Philia: the relationship between friends.

Eros: we all know that one, it is romantic.

And we all know Agape, the self-giving sacrificing love of God, which is between Christ and His Church.

Of course Paul is speaking of Agape when it comes to Christians loving one another.

How is Agape unique?

Storage, philia and eros are mostly to do with me while agape love is all about you!

Paul then describes Agape Love.

It is patient: the quality of constantly being concerned about the other person's welfare without yielding to weariness.

It is kind: the quality of being tender in heart, speech and actions.

It does not envy: the quality of not feeling jealous of what others have or become.

It does not boast: the quality of not telling one's own achievements, possessions, or abilities with excessive pride.

It is not proud: the quality of being approachable, not arrogant and overbearing.

It is not rude: the quality of being genuinely courteous and polite in speech.

It is not selfish: the quality of being truly concerned about the welfare of others even if it is costly.

It is slow to anger: the quality of being long tempered or slowness to express anger.

It keeps no records of wrongs: the quality of forgiving and not holding a grudge against the

offender.

It does not rejoice in evil: the quality of not gloating over another person's failures.

It rejoices in the truth: the quality of rejoicing when the truth is revealed in the lives of others.

It bears all things: the quality of putting up with everything if it's beneficial to the other person.

It believes all things: the quality of being eager to believe what's best for everyone and to put the most favorable construction on ambiguous actions.

It hopes all things: the quality of being hopeful that those who have failed will not fail again rather than concluding that failure is inevitable.

It endures all things: the quality of not allowing oneself to become overwhelmed but persevere steadfastly through difficult trials.

This is the kind of love Christ loves us with.

All of these characteristics were evident throughout his childhood, public ministry, sufferings and death as well in his resurrection.

This list is definitely overwhelming.

Agape love is not spontaneous.

It is not love at first sight.

It is not cheap!

We have to make an effort.

But we are not alone because Christ gives us grace and the ability to love others even when we feel we are inadequate.

(Read *1 Cor. 13:8-13*)

Love will never become obsolete or invalid.

The Corinthian believers emphasized the gift of tongues as a sign of the indwelling Holy Spirit.

But Paul says that the gifts will one day be no longer necessary, but love will always be because love is the true sign of the indwelling Holy Spirit.

Other gifts do not have eternal value compared to love.

Then Paul describes maturity as in a child.

Childish behavior should end as one matures in age and Christianity.

And spiritual gifts will be no longer necessary when Christ returns.

As to seeing a reflection imperfectly: the mirrors of the time we polished metal and were not all that clear.

God's present revelation to man is as such.

But when Christ returns we will stand before God, see him face to face, and know him in full and the need for spiritual gifts will pass away.

But love, faith and hope will last forever.

However, love is the greatest of them all.

We often see that the human love has an end to it.

Marriages fall apart,

Family members can become estranged from one another.

Friends can become foes.

Such is human love.

The love of God is not like that.

He does not take back his love when we fall short of his expectations but continues to love us.

Hence we also must love one another without ceasing.

Very often we fail to love endlessly because we are unwilling to forgive.

But we can love without ceasing if we forgive without ceasing.

How does your conduct measure up to Paul's description of love in your dealing with others.

Whether they be friends or foes?

Remember, without love, our labor means nothing!

Are you committed to walking in “The More Excellent Way of Love?”  
Commit to it and ask God, through Jesus and the Holy Spirit, to help you live it.  
Then we will be ready for walking into the kingdom of God.  
For we will be already living in it!