

Topic	Love is at the Center of the Community
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This chapter is the chapter of love. The word 'love' itself conjures up a flurry of feelings. We all understand what love means, we've all experienced love and that includes both good and bad experiences and we know the weight of the word, just the word itself. We know that we use it to uplift by saying, 'I love you' or 'I love what you do' or we use it to hurt or to put down by saying, 'I don't love you' or 'I have never loved you'. So in the word itself, it holds weight. It is an emotional word.

Chapter 13 is really the premier passage on love. It is really up there in terms of the most famous passages of scripture. It is perhaps, the most famous piece of literature on love, a passage that even non-Christians can quote bits and pieces of, because they've heard it so many times. We quote it at weddings, we put it on our desktop backgrounds, on our phone backgrounds, we frame it up, put it on our wall, we hang it on our mirrors or on our fridges, because we want to remind ourselves to be loving, to be patient and kind and things like that and I would agree. I would say, it is the most deep, exhaustive, the greatest most beautiful and descriptive piece on love that has ever been penned, I would agree.

But as sinners, often our definition of love strays from biblical definition. We get our definition of love, we tend to get it from the media, from today's leaders, from culture. For example, when we watch Hollywood movies or when we read romantic books and we think that it is love. When we look at our leaders, people like the Obamas, president of the United States, look at his beautiful family and we say that is love. Oprah is known for her quote, 'you get a car', they are so kind to other people and we are like, ah! That is love. But by right, the only media that should influence our definition of love is the bible. The only leader that should influence our understanding of love is Jesus Christ and the only culture that should affect our definition of love is kingdom culture. So we are going to try today to pull back from Hollywoodian definition of love, the world's definition of love and go back into the biblical definition of love.

CONTEXT:

Corinth was an extremely metropolitan and industrial city, much like KL. The people who went to live and work in Corinth were go getters, they were entrepreneurs, failure was not an option for them. So they were not only successful in their careers, they were also very gifted spiritually. The church was a gifted church. We know for sure that they spoke in tongues. We know that they had interpretation of tongues and we know that they were given the gift of prophesy. And it seems implied that they were also given the gifts of doing miraculous works and they were also giving financially very sacrificially; it is implied there. So this really sounds like a perfect church. From the outside the Corinthian church looks like a great church, successful in the world, successful in the church, but not exactly they were the most immoral of all the churches. Paul is rebuking them in his letter, one issue after the other.

- Chapter 1-4, Paul deals with disunity in the church.
- Chapter 5-6, immorality in the church.
- Chapter 7, the issue of marriage in the church
- Chapter 8-11, misuse of their liberty in the church
- Chapter 11, the role of men and women in the church
- Chapter 11, the abuse of the Lord's Supper in the church.
- Chapter 12, misunderstanding the spiritual gifts and interdependence in the church.

So you see when Paul was writing chapter 13, where we are at today, he was not writing a poem on love. When he wrote the words, if I speak in the tongues of men and of angels but have not love I am only resounding gong, love is patient, love is kind, it does not envy, it does not boast. The Corinthians weren't going, "Amen, hallelujah, Oh Paul such a greater writer this guy, I love this guy". No, they were likely bowing their heads in shame because he is writing about them. He is rebuking them for their love-lessness. So keep that in mind.

If we go back a little to chapter 12 verse 1, it says

1 Now about the gifts of the Spirit, ...

So the specific context is, we are talking about their mishandling of the gifts of the spirit and their love-lessness with regards to this, but I think it is fair to say that it also applies to the wider context of the entire letter. So all the issues in the past chapters, chapters 1 to 11, it is all because of a lack of love. They were not unified because of the lack of love, they were unfaithful in marriage because of the lack of love. They were suing one another because of a lack of love and so the wider context is also love-lessness in all their issues and their depravity. **That's the context.**

LET'S GET INTO THE TEXT...

1If I speak in the tongues a of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal.

Now I know that there is a dispute about what tongues are but, in this verse, it is very clear. It is talking about languages. It is human languages. Now imagine this gift, you could speak every language in the world, what an awesome gift. You could fly to anywhere in the world, touchdown and the first person you meet, you could speak in their native language. That is some gift. Imagine, how many missionaries have prayed for that gift. Regarding tongue of angels, imagine having a regular audience with angels and demons. I am not so sure I want that gift but note here that Paul is speaking in hypothetical superlatives. What it means is basically there are theoretical extremes. There are scenarios that are not really real. Let's look at it. No one in the Bible could ever speak every language in the world, even at Pentecost, it was a select group of people, a select group of languages and it was a one-off occasion and speaking in the tongues of angels, every time that a human speaks to an angel in the Bible, it is their native tongue. It is in a human

language. So he is speaking in theoretical extremes to prove his point and his point is this, that you could be a spiritual superman but without love you are nothing. That is his point. As we get to verse 2 and 3 you will see his point come out stronger and stronger.

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 do not have love, I am nothing.

So prophesy is receiving revelation from God to be delivered to his people. Wow! Imagine that God speaks to you and he says, 'Sam, go and tell the people what I say'. Huh! That is some gift. Now this is a real gift. The gift of prophesy is evident in the Old Testament and the New Testament, so this is a real gift. The person who got closest to this was Solomon. Solomon, the wisest man in the world and people would travel from all over the world to come see Solomon, to have an audience with him, to listen to him, to get his advice, to get his judgement on things, they would travel and they would give him gifts but even Solomon did not know everything.

Jesus taught that faith, as small as, a mustard seed can move mountains but what Jesus is trying to teach there is that, you can do big things with a small faith because your small faith is in a big God. But Paul is not talking about someone with mustard seed faith here, he is painting a picture of a spiritual superman. He is not talking about mustard seed faith, he is talking about someone with like avocado seed faith or mango seed faith, huge faith, the spiritual superman. So again note that it is superlative, no one in the Bible has ever prayed and a mountain jumped.

3 If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

So Paul now moves away from the spiritual gifts and he turns to extreme self-sacrifice. I empty my bank account and I give it all to the poor, imagine that, give my body to hardship, in the ESV it says give over my body to be burnt. So basically, he is saying, if this spiritual superman was a martyr for the Christian faith, he died for the Christian faith, even then if he had no love it would be nothing. So Paul is painting these grand pictures of a spiritual superman, but he always hits back and he reminds the Corinthians that without love even this person, this imaginary person is nothing. Paul is teaching that, spiritual acts without love is just acting spiritual. Why, because love is preeminent. Spiritual acts without love is like a house without a roof, like a car without wheels or like pockets full of holes, it can only pretend to fulfill the purpose that it was intended for. So you see, the Corinthians had all the gifts. Imagine, they had a beautiful house, wow! They decorated it, they had like carpets and I don't know, leather sofas, but they had no roof. They drove a Ferrari, metaphorically speaking, the engine is all there but the car had no wheels. They had not love and Paul is rebuking them for their spiritual immaturity. They were not speaking in tongues, they were not prophesying, they were not sacrificing or giving for God sake, they were doing it for their own glory.

They were prophesying as loud as they can, they speak in tongues as loud as it can over one another, because they wanted everyone to see that they were spiritual. They were doing it for their own sakes and Paul says, you Corinthians are fools, you have many gifts but no love therefore you are spiritual babies.

11 When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me

He is rebuking them, and he is saying, this is childish what you are doing here. The way that you are handling the spiritual gifts along with your lack of love is childish, it is immature. So let us be a church that is characterized by love because love is preeminent.

THE DESCRIPTION OF LOVE

4 Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. 5 It does not dishonor others, 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. 7 It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

Now when we read this in English, it is all adjectives. In the Greek, they are action words. In the Greek, it renders, love is being patient, love is showing kindness, love is not envying, love is not boasting. So what does it tell us? It tells us that it is not mere sentimentality or emotion as Hollywood teaches us, it is all feeling oriented. No, the biblical definition of love is that, it is behavioral, it is actionable, it is sacrificial, and Paul also speaks of love as if it was a person. Love is patient, love is kind, he personifies love. He is saying that these are not all the attributes of love, not all of them. If I say, this person is kind. Am I saying that kindness is the only attribute this person has? Of course not, maybe it is there strong suit. So in the same way, Paul is personifying love. He is saying, these are some attributes. He is saying that love can't be defined, it can only be described. So he is trying his best to paint this picture of love because biblical love can't be defined.

Now I am not going to spend any time to expound each of the terms because this is not systematic theology, it is not hard to grasp. The hard part is doing it, not understanding it. So while I believe that all these attributes of love, they can be applied to your workplace, they can be applied to your marriages, they can be applied to your families, in this specific context Paul is talking about love in the Corinthian church. So let's talk about love in First Baptist Church. How do we measure up to this list? If we were tested against the light of this picture of love, how do we hold up? Would you mind I speak to some areas where I feel that we as a church fall short?

Arrogance and Pride:

A lot of people in this room are very wealthy people and guess what it is a good thing, don't worry about it. If God wanted you to be poor, you would be poor. The fact that you are wealthy is because God has blessed you with this wealth and the kingdom can use people with large resource pulls, the kingdom would need people high up in the ranks in politics, managers and directors of your companies, people who are in the C suite offices on their companies, people who are business owners, the kingdom needs people like that. So if you are using your resources for God, for the kingdom, for the mission, don't feel guilty at all for being wealthy, we need the Jobs, we need the Abrahams, we need the King Davids.

The problem though is that the Bible has plenty to say about wealth and its drawing power. See wealth and status is fertile ground for pride to grow. The place where I see that we are a little

bit proud in the church is, the first example is in worship. We get complaints about worship all the time. We are a terribly complaining church, worship is too fast, worship is too slow, worship is too old, worship is too new, it is too loud, it is too soft, complain, complain and complain. Did you know, a healthy church has a range of people, different people, old people and young people. Imagine if everyone was in their 60s and above, imagine a church like that, it be kind of stale, it be kind of boring, I don't think I would offend them if I say that, it would not be energetic. There will be vibrance but then again on the other side lets say this church was all youth, where would the wisdom be, where would the experience be, the church. If we were all youth, we would be radical, we would be extreme, we would be foolish.

So a healthy church should have people who are old and who are young, people from every tongue, people from every nation and that's what we have here. We do have that here at FBC. That's a good thing. The problem is this, everyone wants their way with worship. It shows me that many of us worship not in spirit and in truth. In reality it seems to me like worship to us is in sound, in skill and in performance. I've heard of people who come up to the worship team, who has given up their week day and nights to practice, they come up to the worship team during their practice, disrupt their practice, pull the worship leader aside and say, 'hey, this is how you should do the worship', this is how you should run the music. The worship team gives up their week day and night to prepare for two Sunday services and you have the arrogance and audacity to disrupt their practice and tell them how it should be done. Tell me that is not arrogance. The worship team is the first team in this room. They are the ones who turn on the light and they are the ones who turn off the lights. They are the last people to leave the church.

So is not God glorified in both hymns and contemporary songs. Is he not glorified in both loud and soft music? Is he not glorified in both slow and fast songs? As long as though songs sing of hymn what's wrong? We need to learn how to worship in spirit and in truth. So we need to repent of our arrogance and our pride in worship.

Our Pride in the Word:

I overheard a conversation that went something like this;

"hey, you know, what you should try BSF (Bible Study Fellowship), I have done it before. It is the best program; it is the hardest program out there. You have to do homework, you have to attend all the meetings, you have to memorize, you have to read, I dare you try, you try and go attend BSF and then go and find, see if you can find any other program that is harder than BSF"

That was a legitimate conversation that I heard. At FBC, we are blessed to have many gifted and talented and knowledgeable bible teachers and many of us attend the church for that very reason. FBC upholds the Bible, upholds the word of God and teaches it accurately. Many of us are here for that very reason and so we are people of the Word. Let's look at the word,

Deuteronomy 17:18-20, the kings of Israel were charged with a task when they first come into office. They were to create a handwritten copy of the law. So that they can read it day and night, so that they would follow the law to the letter and it says something else that is very interesting, it says, so that they will also not think of themselves more highly than their fellow Israelites. So you see, the scriptures are supposed to lead us to obedience and lead us to humility.



Psalms 119:11, I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you. Scripture is supposed to lead us and keep us on the path of purity.

Psalm 119:35, guide me in the path of your commands for in them I find delight. Scripture is supposed to help us to know God and to delight in him.

Acts 17:11, *Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so.* Why were they considered of more noble character, because they examine what Paul was saying to see what he was saying was true. Scripture leads us to the truth.

2-Timothy 3:16, *All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.* Scripture leads us to righteousness.

Hebrews 4:12, *the word of God is alive and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, able to penetrate and divide soul and spirit, joint and marrow, judging the thoughts and attitudes of our hearts.*

So we may do many spiritual things. We may do many good works but we read the scripture we that we know what the motivation behind those good works are. So you see the saints of old, they use scripture to know God, to delight in him, they use scripture to gain wisdom so that they would know how to govern God's people. They use scriptures to keep on the path of purity and fight against temptation. They use scriptures as their guide to the truth. We use scripture as a punchline. We use it as a badge of honor. We use it to bash each other over the head with. We use it to look smart in conversations and win arguments. So Hebrews 4:12, judge for yourselves.

So judge for yourself, what is the motivation behind you going to all these Bible studies and learning. What is your motivation when you read, when you memorize, is it for God's sake or is it for your own pride, your own honor and your own glory.

Pride in Doctrine:

You see in recent times as we have been looking at 1-Corinthians we finally got to these chapters 12, 13 and 14, I couldn't wait, I was wanting to see how the church would react to the spiritual gifts because in the church, in Christian communities all over the world, this is a big debate, this is a point of contention and I would be to general about it. There are two main camps; charismatics and the non-charismatics. They are the continuationist and the cessationist. Those that believe that the gifts have ceased and those that believe that the gifts are continued to today. Those are the two main camps. Now I am not going to get into the doctrine of it all because that is not the thrust of chapter 13. The thrust of 13 is this, amidst the differences and the ambiguity surrounding this subject, do we love one another. That is the thrust of 13.

When Paul wrote chapters 12-14, I don't think he knew that churches in the 20th and the 21st century would split over this. I think if he knew he would have had tears in his eyes as he penned the letter, I think God is heartbroken when he sees churches split over the spiritual gifts. How many times in scripture do we see be unified, be unified, have unity, love one another, be unified. God wants us to be unified as a church, so whatever we believe, whatever camp we are in, can

we not at least agree on a few things, that there is ambiguity surrounding the subject and when there is ambiguity should there not be grace, should we not be gracious and respectful to one another even if we have different beliefs. Can we not agree charismatics and non-charismatics that we don't know everything? We spoke about this couple of minutes ago, even Solomon in all his wisdom did not know everything. So there is a possibility that your opinion and my opinion on the spiritual gifts could be wrong. When we can be wrong, shouldn't there be humility.

Can we not all agree that we are all trying to glorify God. Charismatics and non-charismatics are like, can we not agree on that. We argue our case. We argue from the same chapters in the same Bible for the same reason to bring glory to God. We are on the same team. We all want to worship God in a manner which brings him the most glory. So why would we split over this. Now, I am not saying that the church is going to split but that is why we are preaching through this. That is why 1-Corinthians 13 was written. Because above all, love needs to be preeminent, not the spiritual gifts. 1-Corinthians 2:9 says,

however as it is written, what no eye has seen, what no ear has heard and what no human heart has conceived, the things God has prepared for us for those who love him.

In heaven, we are going to be shoulder to shoulder with Charismatics and non-Charismatics. Why? Because look at the above verse. If you love him, you are playing on the same team. Can we be a church that is humble, gracious and in unity. If we use the strengths of both camps to power through for the kingdom, we can do wonders.

In verse 7, it says **always** protects, **always** trust. The word always implies an in spite of. Always protects in spite of the danger, always trust in spite of dishonesty, always hopes in spite of hopelessness, always perseveres in spite of being failed or knocked down again and again and again. That's what the always is. Like we are called to an in spite of kind of love for each other. DA Carson in his book, 'showing the spirit' says this,

When a young man reveals his heart with a passionate declaration, I love you. At least in part, he means that he finds the woman he loves lovely. But God loves what is unlovely.

If as John 3:16 tells us, God loves the world. It is not because the world is so lovely, God can't help himself. God loves the world only because of what he is. Of course unlike God's love, ours is not absolutely self-originating. God's grace so transforms the believer that his or her responses of love are less dependent on the loveliness of the object. You see, God has an in spite of kind of love. An agape kind of love, unconditional. It does not depend on how lovely the object is. He loves because he is loving. We on the other hand have a contractual kind of love. We love based on what we can get. We love based on what the other person can bring us and when the other person stops bringing that thing that we love to us, we stop loving. In our sin that is how we love. As soon as we stop liking them, we stop loving. As soon as we don't agree with them, we stop loving. God calls us to a different kind of love, an in spite of kind of love, a self-originating kind of love.

8 Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away.

Paul says prophecies and tongues will cease and this is the point of contention. This is where the big debate starts. When will it cease, how will it cease. It tells us

9 For we know in part and we prophesy in part, 10 but when completeness comes, what is in part disappears.

We know only a fraction of what is to be known. So when completeness comes and the ESV says when perfection comes. Basically when we are in heaven, when perfection comes that is when tongues and prophecies will cease. Why will it cease in heaven?

12 For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

There will be no need for the gift of prophecy in heaven. There is no need for it when we will be sitting on the lap of Jesus. What will be needs of tongue be, we will be able to speak in everybody's native tongue and we will be able to speak directly to God. There will be no more need for the gift of tongues and of prophecy.

Paul is rebuking them for two things mainly. Making spiritual gifts the indicator of spirituality and putting self before others. So let's not fall into that same pit. Let's learn from the rebuke of the Corinthians and not fall into the same pit.

13 And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

So Paul is saying, instead of focusing on tongues, instead of focusing on prophecy and looking up to those kinds of people with the showy gifts, we should be focused on the fruit of the spirit, not the gift of the spirit but the fruit.

In heave, there will be no hope. Hope is longing for something better, there is nothing to be hoped for when you are in heaven. You in are the best place. There is nothing to hope for. That's why there will be no hope in heaven. There will be no faith in heaven. There will be no need for it in heaven. When Saul was smacked down from his horse by the shiny bright light and God said, why are you persecuting me. He didn't say God is that really you, prove yourself God, I am not sure is it really you. He didn't say that. There was no need for faith right there, face to face with the father, face to face with Jesus. There will be no need for faith. He didn't say, help me believe. Love is the only thing that endures throughout eternity. It is the only thing. So we've talked about the preeminence of love, we talked about the picture of love and finally we are here with the permanence of love. Love is preeminent, love is a picture and love is permanent. So I will close with this. There is a peculiar verse in the Bible, John 13:34

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.

It is not the new command, but it is the Oldest Command in the Bible. Why did Jesus say it is a new command? Jesus love was so outlandish, was so foreign, it was so different, it was so in spite of, it was so self-originating that it made the Old Testament command to love seem like it was a whole different command. Jesus personified perfect love and so if you want to know how to love perfectly, look at the gospels and see the life of Jesus and how he loved.

The greatest act of love in human history was act the death of Jesus on the cross for our sins. He was patient when his disciples fell asleep in his hour of greatest need. He was kind when he healed the servant's ear. He did not envy his prosecutors. He did not boast in his deity. He was not proud when they spat on him. He was not rude when they taunted him. He was not self-seeking when he prayed, your will be done. He was not easily angered when they flogged him. As he hung on the cross, he prayed, 'father, forgive them for they know not what they do'. Because he keeps no record of wrongs. He never delighted in evil but told his disciples to pray against temptation. He rejoiced in the truth when Thomas exclaimed, 'my lord, my God'. He protected his mother when he told John to take care of her as he hung on the cross. He trusted Judas though he knew he would betray him. He trusted Thomas though he knew he would doubt him. He trusted Peter though he knew he would deny him, and he trusted God though he knew he would crush him. He hoped in the joy that was sat before him as he endured the cross and persevered until it was finished. This is the God that we serve. This the God that we worship. That is the gospel. How can I live for anything else when God gave his son for me. There is no one else for me, none but Jesus crucified to set me free, now I live to bring him praise. Come see his hands and his feet, the scars that speak of sacrifice, hands that flung stars into space, to cruel man surrendered. That's the gospel.

If this is the first time you are hearing of God's love for you, if this is the first time that this is making sense in your head, it is clicking, if there is a feeling in your heart that you don't understand and know what it is, might a hazard a guess that God is trying to speak to you and He is trying to say, my son and my daughter I love you, I died for you, please come back to me. I died for your sins so that we can be reconciled.

To the believers, can we not love one another, stand shoulder to shoulder with the charismatics and the non-charismatics alike, love another and worship God because the cross is central to our faith. The vision of the church this year is gospel, community and mission. Without love, there is no gospel. Without love, there is only bitterness in community. Without love, there is power in missions. So can we stand shoulder to shoulder with one another, worship our God and love one another for his sake.