

## Gamma 2017

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We tend to have a very romantic notion of love. 1-Corinthians 13 was most famously used in Prince William and Kate Middleton's wedding. It was read by the then Prime Minister, David Cameron and from there the Bishop of York gave a good sermon, which the main thrust was, *be who God wants you to be*. If you have had used it as your wedding text I applaud you because the call of love in the scriptures is very-very heavy, but if this text 1-Cor 13 is only for weddings, love, family relationships, I have one question, why is it lodged between chapter 12 and 14 where it talks about spiritual gifts? To some scholars it feels like Paul is suddenly speaking off tangent, because he is talking about prophecies and tongues and gifts then suddenly comes this romantic notion of 1-Cor 13 about love and then we go back to spiritual gifts. What I found that is that, chiastically, meaning in the Hebrew tradition of writing, the climax is at the middle. So chapter 12 and chapter 14 is the buildup and let down of what the main climax is and chapter 13 is the climax.

I am convinced that 1-Cor 13 is also the climax of the whole book of 1-Cor, because you may talk about leadership, you may talk about Lord's Supper, you may talk about woman may be needing to wear veils over their heads. We may discuss about freedom; we may discuss about conformity but you discuss all of these things without the notion of love, it is nothing. 1-Cor 13 therefore is the climax of the whole book and it specifically therefore talks about Christ love for his church and the church reciprocation of that love not just back upward towards God but towards the community around us. It is not meant to be just for the church, it is meant to be seen mostly in the church and then shared to the community around us. So already that is a very harsh tone that Paul is actually saying.

### **What does love therefore look like?**

Because I mentioned that 1-Cor 13 is a chiastic, meaning the climax is in the middle of the text, let me first talk to you about the head and the tail then we spend a bit more time on the middle which is the meat.

### **THE PERSEVERANCE OF LOVE**

**Love Is Preeminent:** Love is before all things, love had existed even before there was an object to love and objectified in the first place. Because love is actually the very nature of God. So you may receive all kinds of gifts, you may receive all kinds of calling, you may have the talent which God has given you imparted to you so that you may use it for the kingdom of God but if your attitude and if the front and center of your heart is not love, it is a waste of time, because why love is preeminent.

1 If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have 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 do not have love, I am nothing. 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.

These three things in the Corinthians community are known as to be noble religious acts. The speaking of tongues of men and of angels is basically equivalent to the pagan version is like someone in a trance.

Who would love to have that gift of prophecy, to be able to foresee the future. We have been looking for it even until today, because it always asks the question, who will be my life partner for those who are younger. What is the next four-digit number that I can buy? We claim ourselves to be also like part-time prophets.

King James version says, if I give all I possess to poor and give over my body to the fire. We see this phenomenon quite often where in Thailand a monk is furious and in protest he dowses himself with gasoline and then he lights himself on fire while sitting in a lotus position. We look at that as those things to be godly, holy, but actually in the context of the gospel that is not love, that is not Godly. Because there is no love.

So here therefore we see a formula, spiritual gifts identified, tongues and prophecy, faith and charity, these are the spiritual gifts that are mentioned here. So here is one formula. *Spiritual gifts but if influenced without love is nothing, is not holiness.* On the flip side if you practice your spiritual gifts and you do it with the love of God that is true holiness. So this is what Paul is saying. Paul is actually competing and telling the people who are still very easily influenced by the culture around Corinth, saying that, because there are lot of people who still think that, okay if I can prophesize then I can make money, if I can prophesize then I can predict the future and people will look out to me. If I give everything to the poor, it is not too bad, you know why, because then the community had no choice but to take care of me. Me, myself and I, holiness therefore becomes a business transaction, whereas holiness in the context of God is actually love that humbles yourself to be able to help the needs of those around you.

The gospel says that if you do all these things but do not love, do not serve, do not care for the sake of others, this does not look like Jesus. Jesus goes to the servant and washes his feet. When the pastor, the teacher, the preacher gets off his pulpit, rolls up his sleeves and helps out to clean the communion cups behind. It is when captains in Boys Brigade would step away from his very heavy burden of the red rank and still be willing to sit down the next members and ask how is your day.

So the precedence of love is this that love is preeminent, love is before all things, before we start opening another ministry we better ask the question, can we love it. Can we love the people that we are willing to reach out? Before we expand, we had to ask the question, can we love even more. Before we say, you want to go deeper in discipleship we must first ask can we love one another. The preeminent is love, if you cannot love don't do it. If you cannot love the people who you are feeding in the streets, don't do the ministry. Because it is not for your holiness, it is because God has called you to love them.

**Love Lasts Forever:** The reason why we want every ministry of Jesus Christ to be front and center about love, is because love is the only thing that will last. We read the text, love never fails. That is a very bold statement. Paul here is not talking about the earthly love and our imperfect ways of showing love, no, he is actually talking about the love that God displayed on the cross and when Paul talks about love he is actually talking about God himself being in very nature love. Apostle John said, *Love one another because God is love.*

You can very well change every word love and change it with God it actually makes sense.

*1 If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have God, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal.....if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have God, I am nothing.*

So love never fails because we are not talking about any ordinary love, we are talking about the love that God of who God is and how he displayed it on the cross. That love never fails and that's why we can say love never fails.

So spiritual gifts over the aspect of time is only going to be lasting temporarily, spiritual gifts alone. Spiritual gifts without the notion or the first impression of love will not go far and will not last long. Whereas spiritual gifts empowered by love over the length of time it will last forever. It is exactly just what the text says.

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

Paul was actually speaking to a Greek culture and an ancient experience. For the Greeks, the pursuit of everything is embodied in the thing called knowledge that's why people who are philosophers they go to a school of philosophy and whoever go on that they say it is a noble pursuit because it has anything in the Greek world where they feel is what they are pursuing it is knowledge. For the Romans it is glory. They want immortality by being remembered. Julius Caesar did all those great wars and battles because he was looking for glory. Because glory will have him be remembered forever. To the Hebrews, it is light. They are people with primitive lighting. So in the daytime they get a lot of sun, at night it gets cold and it gets very-very dark very fast. Light therefore symbolizes the pursuit of life and as long as you can see light you are therefore alive. Paul knows that he is talking to a bunch of Greek people. Paul knows that he is talking about a Greek cultured Roman citizens. So he says that, we know this impart, one day we will see it as a whole. So at the moment the image of God, the image of the love of God should be in us and is very vague, but eventually we will see it in full and he therefore gives two examples.

Paul in his genius of who he is, a student of Gamaliel, of Greek philosophy, a roman citizen and a Pharisee. So he knows Hebrew, Greek and Roman culture and so when you read 2-Cor next time you are going to be very impressed by this statement.

*For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ. 2-Cor 4:6*

So put it all together, because if you don't understand this part then the two illustrations later you will not understand. So what he is saying is this.

The Greeks and the Romans and the Hebrews always do not want to put a face to God, why, if they put a face to God to the Hebrews it is like death, because when you see face of God you will see death but also the moment you have a face on God perfection then becomes a picture, you can see and you can then say. The pagan people try to make this pursuit of holiness, knowledge, glory and life to be very vague and therefore if it come translated and interpreted by a whole different schools and different temples would have different point of view. Paul is pulling the church of Corinth back into the community and hey it is not that vague. It is not that God did not reveal himself, he did. This same God who says let the light shine upon man has now caused that light to shine upon us not only so that we can see ourselves but we will also be able to get the fullest of life in the knowledge and the glory in the face of Christ. So in another words if you don't know what love looks like, look at Christ. If you don't know what love should feel like look at Christ. He doesn't always feel good but he was convicted.

Now that we understand this we have two illustrations.

**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.**

Childhood and being a kid comes very naturally to most, not all of us, but when do we know when I became a man. How do we know that we have become man and woman, no longer boys and girls and children? We have role model, you have aspirations to be and so when you decide to say, okay when I become a man I have to stop doing the childish things.

Love is a maturing thing; that's why it takes forever that's why it will last forever because it is a maturing experience that we have with God. What we now know impart we will eventually know in full in the face of Christ.

What we try to love like little children, we will one day be able to display what love looks like when we come to about the same age as Jesus when he went on the cross. The other one is

**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.**

Looking at mirror in Bible is like looking at Jesus, you see how perfect He is and how imperfect you are. Now that we know the perseverance of love, love will last forever if it is the love of Christ, now we should therefore ask the question.

### **What does love look like?**

So the character of love. Love is patient, love is kind. These are the only two proactive descriptions that Paul says in this text, because the rest you notice, it is not, it is not, then only later it always protects, always trusts, always hopes and always perseveres. So what is patience and what is kindness?

The word patience comes from *makrothumia*. It comes from two words glued together as one, makros is long time and thumia which means rough. That's why the King James Version will translate it as long suffering, but the character that we now use with modern English is patience. Love is patience, love is therefore having the ability to be able to endure long-time of hardship without hoping for payment back. Kindness basically means to act benevolently or to act kindly. This is the root word from chrestos which means to be useful. Love is therefore not an experience which we feel but it is actually an ability that we do.

The point of love in 1-Cor 13 is actually to say that love is hard, love is difficult and that love is something that you do even when you don't feel like it.

Love is a conviction of action where we say, I decide to love you even on days when I don't like you. Love is an action and it takes a long time of hardship. What does therefore Jesus show as the face of such love, impatience and kindness, Paul says it this way.

God's demonstrate his own love for us than this that while we were still sinners, this is actually saying God is actually suffering in the injustice that he sees in his own people but while we were still sinners, Christ died for us that is kindness beyond measure. That is patience that even until now he is waiting for us to turn around and go back to him. So love is patient, love is kind.

Paul is actually calling for a dynamic shift in thinking of what holiness and what godliness looks like. Holiness and godliness doesn't look like how you can make yourself better, holiness is actually what you can do for others to be better. If you are patient and you are kind you do not envy, you will not boast, you will not be proud, you will not dishonor others, you will not speak bad about people, you will not be self-seeking, you will not be easily angered, and you keep no record of wrongs and you do not delight in evil choices with truth.

Paul is saying that it is not like your last religion, your last religion when you see someone better than one you become jealous, it is not like that. If you see someone better than you good for them, continue to help others. When you achieve something you become proud of it because you have attained a whole new level of holiness. You are no longer the brown rope wearing monk, you have now become the orange rope wearing monk, eventually you would the one wearing the red band, that is not the case. When you see others being better than you or if you become better you say thanks be to God. Now he makes me even a more useful servant.

### **Does not dishonor others.**

You point out the wrongs of others so you yourself may look better and does not delight in evil. So holiness and God seekingness is no longer a narcissistic form of self-seeking idolatry. You are not intending to make yourself better, you have been made alive fully and consecrated in Christ, is now calling us to be selfless and displaying that selfless love unto God and unto others.

Love does not rejoice in evil, we actually rejoice when we see the truth. What should be our reaction against violence as a Christian?

We should pray. Once we have that attitude of love, the way we view the world would be very different that's why we only see the moment as like a reflection, very blurred, very vague because

there is nowhere like how the world sees it but one day when we see Christ face to face we now then know what Christ and love truly looks like the gospel.

A story to summarize this.

This is a story of two men who were at the temple and they were praying. Now when the man gathered at the temple they were praying it was a specific time, it is the time where the sin offering is about to be offered. The sin offering is going to be offered and therefore these two people, one is a Pharisee and the other is a tax collector goes to the temple. The Pharisee goes front and center, the popular chairs. The tax collector remains all the way behind. The Pharisee looks up to the heavens and is able to say, *God I thank you that you made you such a good boy. I thank you that you have provided everything for me and even the ability to be such a good-good citizen, not like that tax collector behind. He is saying that unlike what he is doing probably I fast twice a week every Tuesday and Thursday on top of Sabbath and I give one-tenth of my income.* He was actually trying to justify I actually do not need it; I can stand on my own accord. The tax collector would not even then look up to the skies. The traditional viewing of that's where God is, he dares not look at the face of God. He hits his chest in repentance and say, O God forgive me, a sinner. Why does he do this? Because actually this is actually the traditional display of repentance and is the idea of that sacrifice that is being done as a sin offering and atonement, O God let that offering cover me. Let that the sin offering be effective for me. O God please through that sin offering you will forgive me, a sinner and because of his faith on the sin offering he was forgiven and through the Holy Spirit he would know what looks like and that's why the tax collector can stand alongside the Pharisee and therefore be proven righteous.

Why?

Because one is trying to still do things via narcissistic self-seeking idolatry, the other one depends on Jesus Christ on the cross, saying that that is enough for me, now I will show his love to others.

Love actually teaches us that we need to believe in the best of other people and hope for the best of them. Now a lot of people may say, isn't this verse about how God always protect, how God always trust, how God always hopes, how God always perseveres, yes but at the same time because you know that he will persevere, he will protect, he provides hope you should therefore pass it on. So love believes the best of others and hopes for the best of them.

**13 So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.**

Paul is saying as a conclusion here, he is not saying that the greatest of these is love. The word here for greatest actually means that the first of three is love. Why, you will not be able to have faith or hope unless you first experience that love. How do we know that we can have faith in Jesus Christ, because of his love for us? How do we know that we have a hope of glory in the near future? Because his love promises that we will last until we see him.

There is a tradition of a veil and cord in some weddings. The veil represents the warmth and love of God. The cord represents the love that will bind them together to be one person and through that love by faith the man is covered only at the shoulder because God has given him leadership over the

family and by faith and in hope the woman's head is covered by that same cloth to show submission and trust in her husband. They will experience this through love.

Christ is calling us to abide in Christ's love, to cover our heads in the veil of submission before Christ and then be given a cord to show that we are now one with Christ. Our identity is only in Christ.